



title:	Peronism and Argentina Latin American Silhouettes
author:	Brennan, James P.
publisher:	Scholarly Resources, Inc.
isbn10 asin:	0842027068
print isbn13:	9780842027069
ebook isbn13:	9780585196336
language:	English
subject	Peronism--History, Argentina--Politics and government--1943- , Social movements--Argentina--History--20th century.
publication date:	1998
lcc:	F2849.P492 1998eb
ddc:	982.06
subject:	Peronism--History, Argentina--Politics and government--1943- , Social movements--Argentina--History--20th century.

Peronism and Argentina

Edited By
James P. Brennan



A Scholarly Resources Inc. Imprint
Wilmington, Delaware

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published 1998 Printed and bound in the United States of America
Scholarly Resources Inc. 104 Greenhill Avenue Wilmington, DE
19805-1897

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Peronism and Argentina / edited by James P. Brennan.

p. cm. - (Latin American silhouettes)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8420-2706-8 (cloth: alk. paper)

1. Peronism-History. 2. Argentina-Politics and
government-1943- 3. Social movements-Arentina-

History-20th century. I. Brennan, James P., 1955-.

II. Series.

F2849.P492 1998

982.06-dc21

97-46486

CIP

♻️ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum
requirements of the American National Standard for permanence of
paper for printed library materials, Z39.48, 1984.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The genesis of this book was a conference held on Peronism that was organized by Juan Carlos Torre and myself at Harvard University in 1990. The assistance and encouragement of several people allowed us to make the long journey from conference papers to book a number of years later. All the contributors would like to thank Richard M. Hopper of Scholarly Resources for his support of the project. I would personally like to extend my gratitude to Tulio Halperin Donghi for reading the manuscript, offering useful criticisms, and encouraging me to pursue publication. A final note of thanks goes to Gabriel Ondetti for skillfully editing my English translations of the chapters written in Spanish.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1943 a military government that would rule Argentina for nearly the next three years seized power. One member of that government, Col. Juan Domingo Perón, would eventually come to have a preponderant influence among the country's new military leaders, largely because of the close relationship that he established with the country's working class and trade union movement. With the support of those sectors and with his charismatic wife, Evita, for almost a decade, from 1946 to 1955, Perón as president exercised the kind of power that few twentieth-century Latin American political leaders have ever known. He transformed Argentina's political culture and made deep changes, not all of them beneficial, in the country's economic structure, social relations, and politics. The Argentine historian Tulio Halperin Donghi has spoken of a "Peronist revolution," a statement that might appear historical hyperbole but which, if seen from the perspective of the Argentines themselves, gains a certain credibility. ¹ Certainly, the movement that Perón created would occupy a central place in Argentine national life for a half-century.

Peronism remains a controversial subject. It has generated a vast literature, both polemical and scholarly, and considerable disagreement remains about its ideological orientation, social base, and compatibility with a pluralistic, democratic society. Perón's movement emerged at a particular historical juncture, with international fascism not yet defeated and liberal capitalism still tarnished by the global depression. On the one hand, in its origins Peronism contained some clear authoritarian and corporatist

tendencies, tendencies that continued to characterize it-and arguably still do-long after such ideas fell from favor. On the other hand, like its fellow populist movements in Latin America but even more so, Peronism opened society to previously excluded groups and classes and incorporated them both discursively and materially into the national mainstream. Its claim to be the great democratizing force in twentieth-century Argentine history cannot be dismissed as mere bombast, containing as it does a considerable degree of truth.

Peronism has been given up for dead many times, but its stubbornness and refusal to disappear are a testimony to its appeal to those excluded from power and to the victims of Argentina's injustices.

In 1989, following the presidential election of Carlos Saúl Menem and the capture of sizable congressional majorities by his Peronist Party, those who had yet again predicted Peronism's demise were confronted with having to explain the movement's dramatic resurrection. Just a few years before, in 1983, the Peronist Party had suffered a crushing electoral defeat by the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR). Its prospects for remaining the dominant political movement in the country had looked bleak. Menem's 1989 election was even more remarkable, given the great expectations that Raúl Alfonsín's presidency (1983-1989) had raised and the widespread belief, at least during Alfonsín's early years in office, that Peronism was finally losing its hold on the popular classes, a surprising number of whom had voted for the UCR candidate in the 1983 election. To many, Peronism appeared little more than an embarrassing anachronism in a recently restored democracy, one whose citizenry had seemingly determined to break with the country's authoritarian past. Peronism's restoration in 1989 thus loomed, in the eyes of its critics, as a huge step backward. Many were at a loss to explain its continued appeal, as it was believed that Perón and Peronism had contributed more than their share to Argentina's long, seemingly insoluble crisis.

Alfonsín's failure and the resurrection of Peronism had been unanticipated, and many Argentines feared a return to the tragic and violent conditions of the recent past. However, Peronism's

return was also an opportunity to reassess this complex movement, one so central to Argentina's twentieth-century experience and perhaps the single defining element in the country's contemporary history. In 1990 a conference was held at Harvard University to discuss Peronism by bringing together the leading scholars, mainly Argentines, who had long been studying Peronism and the Peronist phenomenon. Harvard seemed an appropriate place for such a conference, as it had been a Harvard professor, Gino Germani, who had elaborated the most influential and controversial interpretations of Peronism, interpretations that, as several of these essays note, still occupy an important place in the polemic surrounding Peronism.

The results of the conference were disappointing, and few new perspectives seemed to emerge from the discussions. This was in large measure because Menem had been in office less than one year, and the dramatic changes that Peronism was then undergoing were

too recent for anyone to make sense of; moreover, they were causing all those who had studied the Peronist past to reevaluate their previous interpretations. At the end of the conference, we decided to continue to work on the papers that we had presented and to attempt a synthesis on the Peronist past, in the hopes of producing a collection of essays that might serve as a starting point for a new historiography on Peronism. In the following years, I translated the essays that were written in Spanish, worked considerably on my own, and thought a great deal more about these issues. Personal circumstances did not allow me to publish them until now, but that was perhaps for the best, since it has permitted the contributors to this volume to observe the full trajectory of Menem's first administration as well as witness his 1995 reelection. Particularly for those chapters dealing with *menemismo*, this delay in publication has allowed some temporal perspective and greater analytical rigor than otherwise would have been possible.

If anything has emerged in the years between the Harvard conference and the completion of this volume, it is a consensus among the contributors that Peronism's resiliency over half a century has had to do with that currently much used and abused word "culture". Peronism's origins were certainly to be found partly in the economic and social changes that began in the 1930s and intensified during World War II. But none of those changes led ineluctably to Perón or Peronism; the political expression of the changes was at least partly cast in the country's own image and drawn from Argentina's history. Perón and the movement he created clearly captured both the heady international influences of the war years and something in Argentine society at that historical moment. At the time of Perón's rise to power, Argentina was no

longer an immigrant country with a people struggling with exile and adjustment in an isolated part of the world; the Argentines were now an industrial, or at least an urban, people, open to and influenced by the international events and currents of the twentieth century.

Peronism has always been profoundly rooted in national conditions. The great wave of pessimism that swept the country in the thirties; the peculiar strength of a right-wing, nationalist intellectual tradition in Argentina; its popular culture; the precise character of Argentine militarism; the failures of the Argentine left; the deepening of the long-standing conflict between Buenos Aires and the provinces-these were just some of the situations and events that redefined Argentine society in the years preceding the rise of Perón and made him, and Peronism, possible. Moreover, Peronism's

repeated ability to rise from the ashes and articulate the concerns of a majority of Argentines clearly spoke to something more than mere political opportunism. Even before the Peronist Party's triumphant return to power in 1989, the resiliency of Peronism, its protean capacity to reinvent itself, had been demonstrated on many occasions. The ongoing resonance of Peronism in Argentine national life could not be attributed simply to Perón's machinations from exile in Madrid. If post-1955 Argentina was to a certain extent Perón's creature, he too had been its creation. Perón and Peronism survived because they expressed something deep in Argentina's history and collective personality.

This resiliency perhaps should not have come as a surprise as late as 1989. It had been made all the more apparent by this highly personalist movement's outliving the death of its leader in 1974. Moreover, a seminal study on Peronism, Daniel James's history of Peronism and the working class, had been published in 1988 and had done much to illuminate the movement's complex relationship with Argentine society, particularly with the social class that had always composed the base of its support.² But the dramatic Peronist victory in the 1989 election confirmed that Peronism was, for the foreseeable future, a major part of Argentina's political universe. Indeed, the form of Peronism in power since 1989, perhaps belatedly realizing Perón's ambitions for his movement, has drawn the attention of more than just the Argentines. Even more than Chile, whose transition to neoliberalism had been overseen by a brutal military dictatorship, Menem's Argentina in many ways has led the neoliberal revolution of the 1990s in Latin America. The ability of Peronism to redefine itself as a champion of the market economy, opponent of populist excesses, and ally of

the United States has been the most remarkable metamorphosis of any political movement in recent Latin American history. It also has served as an inspiration to governments throughout the region interested in undertaking similar policies. If the Latin American country in which popular nationalism in the form of Peronism has its deepest roots could implement such changes, there was good reason to believe that those changes could succeed elsewhere. Menem's Argentina has drawn the close attention of the international financial and business communities, and everything from the sweeping privatization program to the government's conservative monetary policies has received lavish, sometimes excessive and uninformed, praise. This volume was prepared in the shadow of Menem's revolution.

Part III of the book explicitly deals with the movement, but all the chapters in some way try to explain its emergence and decipher its meaning.

Inasmuch as this is a collective project and one that presents authors who offer conflicting interpretations, a lengthy introduction seems gratuitous. The chapters speak for themselves. To help orient those readers less familiar with Argentina, we have decided to present those essays dealing with the intellectual debate surrounding Peronism first (Chapters 1 and 2); to focus next on the history of the Peronist past (Chapters 3, 4, and 5); and, finally, in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, to concentrate on Peronism's most recent incarnation under the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-). Menem has attempted to break with the historical trajectory of Peronism and to reverse virtually all of its policies-the so-called *menemismo*. The essays are not directly concerned with the figures of Perón or Menem, but rather with Peronism, attempting to place and understand it as a historical, cultural, and political phenomenon. Peronist ideology, although analyzed implicitly in several of the essays, is not dealt with directly. Because Peronism has always lacked a fixed ideological content and its ideology has very much depended on how given social actors interpreted it at a given time, the ideology of Peronism is a complex subject that merits a book in itself. The analytical tools and theories of the new cultural studies could be very effectively applied to such a project. Then, too, Peronist economic policies have also been heterodox and constantly changing, and thus have not been studied in depth. These essays are concerned, above all, with how Peronism has been interpreted by intellectuals and how it has influenced

Argentine politics and civil society over the last half-century. Perhaps, as Juan Carlos Torre has recently suggested, the only thing that characterizes Peronism, the leitmotiv that runs throughout its history, is a certain way of conducting politics. 3 The old adage "The Radicals understand the law but not power, the Peronists understand power but not the law" contains the kind of popular wisdom that scholars could learn from. Moreover, as Cristián Buchrucker notes in his chapter, any intellectual discussion of Peronism inevitably becomes a political discussion when Argentines are involved. Thus this is not merely a book on Peronism but also a dialogue and debate among people with some rather passionate opinions-with myself present as an interested spectator. Indeed, these essays should be understood as part of an ongoing polemic among Argentines about

Peronism in the struggle to strengthen democracy in their country, as well as scholarly analyses about a movement that has now dominated Argentine history for more than a half-century.

Notes

1. Tulio Halperin Donghi, *La larga agonía de la Argentina peronista* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1994).
2. Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
3. "Entrevista a Juan Carlos Torre," in *Pensar la Argentina: Los historiadores hablan de la historia y política*, ed. Roy Hora and Javier Trimboli (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Cielo Por Asalto, 1994).

I THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE

1

Interpretations of Peronism: Old Frameworks and New Perspectives

Cristián Buchrucker

The Debate

The conflicting interpretations of Peronism constitute one of the most controversial issues of contemporary Argentina. Not long ago, a Latin American specialist from North America characterized the question of Peronism as "exasperating" for many scholars, as it was impossible to categorize it in the familiar typologies of political science. ¹ Such exasperation is not something confined to foreign scholars. In 1989, Hugo Chumbita summed up the question of the "characterization of Peronism": "Despite everything that has been said, (Peronism) remains an enigmatic phenomenon for foreigners, difficult to categorize in the social sciences and a point of unfailing ideological-political debate. In Argentina, it is something everyone understands intuitively but about which there is far from existing a consensus regarding a proper definition, to such a point that it is not unusual to find widely varying opinions regarding its character within the movement's very ranks."²

This frustration undoubtedly cannot be surmounted if we assume that we must necessarily fit all the diverse political phenomena of the South American continent into classical European ideological typologies. But this suggestion not to become scandalized by the assertion of Peronism as something "atypical" does not by any

means seek to defend the opposite proposition, that we are in the presence of a political movement absolutely unique and incomparable to any other, an assertion that would close all doors to research and intellectual exchange.

One way to approach the problem might be to order the existing interpretations of Peronism into a three-tiered scheme that would group two competing schools of interpretation linked to Peronism's own internal debate (that is, alternative interpretations coming from within the movement's ranks) with a third, an exogenous perspective. The latter corresponds to the thesis that Peronism is a variant of fascism, with all the negative connotations that such a categorization implies. The former two do not present such a one-dimensional interpretation, as within each there is found a polemic, alternately recriminatory and approbative, sustained among Peronist, conservative, and socialist authors. These are the interpretations that on the one hand revolve around the concept of populism (at times National Populism), and on the other those interpretations that can be categorized as a form of Socialism (at times National Socialism), with revolutionary implications.

Peronism and Fascism

In recent years, "Fascist" and "Socialist" interpretations seem to have entered into a phase of definitive eclipse. Nevertheless, this does not strip them of all the interest that they sparked in past decades. Indeed, they continue to merit attention for two essential reasons: First, they are significant for the understanding of recent Argentine intellectual life and politics. And second, although these interpretations are virtually extinct in their "pure" form, they have left a significant mark on the contemporary debate surrounding populism and its relationship to democracy and authoritarianism in the country. The difficulties posed by the task of presenting so broad a panorama of this vast field are obvious. The brevity of this essay and the need to choose selectively necessarily imply a certain

element of injustice, especially when dealing with so many scholars and interpretations. For that reason, this chapter does not seek to be any more than a synthetic critical review of the most relevant issues.

The authors subscribing to the interpretation of Peronism as a kind of fascism can be grouped into two principal categories: First are those who present a "classic" interpretation of fascism that serves as the axis of their analysis. The works of Carlos Fayt, Paul M. Hayes, Paul H. Lewis, Juan José Sebreli, and Gary W. Wynia are representative of this school. ³ In the second group are scholars who are somewhat ambivalent in their analyses, tending to treat fascism loosely by adding elements not applicable to fascism as it is gener-

ally understood. Here the interpretations of A. F. K. Organski, Hans U. Thamer and Wolfgang Wippermann, Stanley Payne, and M. C. Needler would be included. 4

Examining the diverse interpretations proposed by these scholars, one notes the existence of the nuances that justify the above division. For Fayt, Peronism during the years between 1946 and 1955 was simply "the Argentine version of Italian fascism."⁵ In a similar fashion, Hayes reaches the conclusion that "the Peronist movement produced a form of fascism that was distinctively Latin American, suitable for the conditions that existed in developing countries soon after the war of 1939-45."⁶ Sebreli includes in his study the later stages of Peronism but insists that this movement "always had fascist aspirations and achieved the greatest degree of fascism that Argentine society and the era when it was fated to live would allow."⁷

These polemical interpretations contrast with other, more ambivalent ones. Thamer and Wippermann believe that "Peronism only can be explained with the aid of the concept of fascism, albeit a very broadly defined fascism." But later they show themselves to be hesitant, saying that "Peronism was on the border line between a conventional fascism and a populist-developmental dictatorship." According to Payne, "A careful examination reveals that Peronism had most, but not all, the characteristics of European fascism." Yet he later adds that "it is doubtful whether one can apply with a minimum degree of rigor a typology derived from European fascism to non-European movements and regimes."⁸

A critical analysis of these and similar arguments demands some kind of theoretical framework, one that, sadly, is rarely

employed. One cannot but agree with the suggestion of Brazilian political scientist Helgio Trindade, who, in studying the Brazilian case ("integralismo"), noted that "in order to determine the fascist nature of the 'integralista' movement (and this could be applied to other movements in Latin America of a similar nature) we must analyze the three basic components which characterize European fascism: its ideology, social base, and organization. The combined presence of those elements, even allowing for national deviations, constitute[s] an indispensable guide for determining the fascist character of a political movement outside Europe."⁹

That is what will be attempted in the following pages, employing for that purpose a simplified version of a framework that owes a debt to the pioneering scholarship of Ernst Nolte but that is perfectly compatible with recently proposed definitions of fascism,

such as those of Hagtvet and Kühn, and Payne himself. 10 Such a framework presents a kind of "ideal type" of fascism, based on the examples of Italy and Germany, but it has been formulated with a sufficient degree of flexibility as to exclude any a priori objections that it contains characteristics impossible to reproduce outside Europe. The characteristics of a generic fascism are to be found in the following four dimensions:

Origins of the Movement and Conditions for the Taking of Power.

Military defeat or a "mutilated" victory generally lay the groundwork for fascist movements. In addition, there is usually present a strong sense of unease arising from the growth of Socialist or Communist parties. Economic crisis, the fragility of a liberal democratic culture, and only minimal effectiveness of the government in power are the hallmarks of fascist movements.

Social Base.

Fascist movements incorporate many economic classes, but they are built upon a predominantly middle-class base. The initial nucleus is frequently composed of war veterans and resentful intellectuals. In the taking of power and the organization of the Fascist state, there occurs an alliance between the upper classes and traditional institutions such as the army and state bureaucracy.

Ideology.

Fascism exalts force and action, is antisocialist and antiliberal, glorifies elitism and the principal of leadership over democracy, and is characterized by an authoritarian corporatism and an ultranationalistic imperialism.

Characteristics of the Movement and Regime.

The presence of a charismatic leader and a party militia is almost universal. These are accompanied by a one-party system and totalitarian control of society, systematic state terrorism, a war-based economy, and subordination of domestic politics to the objective of foreign expansion.

In general, even those authors convinced of the fascist character of Peronism recognize that its predominant characteristics resemble very little those of European fascism. Nonetheless, it is necessary to note that there are some dissenting voices. Thamer and Wippermann assert that "one of the principal motivations" for Perón's policies was the fear of a possible "revolutionary cataclysm." Hayes believes that there were "similarities in the social and economic conditions" that preceded the coming to power of fascism and Peronism, although he does not explain clearly what

they were. Finally, Sebreli returns to an old argument by which it is not necessary to find similarities between fascism and Peronism because the connection was of an organic nature: The 1943 military coup was orchestrated by the Third Reich, and Peronism thus was its direct offspring. 11

What can be said about these assertions? The anti-Communist motivation unquestionably existed, but it can hardly be considered uniquely Peronist. The anticommunism of the Radical Party and the conservative upper classes was equally real. Moreover, there was no mass-based, genuinely threatening Marxist-Leninist party in Argentina between 1943 and 1945. The political atmosphere was not comparable with that of Germany or Italy between 1918 and 1920. Perón occasionally employed an anti-Communist discourse when he addressed a conservative audience, obviously because his arguments regarding the need for reforms in order to undermine the Marxist threat carried weight only if such a threat could be made to appear to exist.¹² The only similarity between the conditions in Argentina in the forties and those in Italy in 1922 or Germany in 1933 was the country's marked polarization. But the political structure of that polarization was very different from what was seen in Europe. In Argentina, "leftists" and "rightists," no less than "centrists," allied with one another in opposing camps. As an interpretive oddity, we should note Organski's strange thesis that the 1943 coup actually favored the agrarian elite, ultimately resulting in a "syncretic" alliance, typically Fascist, between the agrarian and industrial interests—an alliance of which Peronism was the political expression.¹³ This interpretation has not found much support, given the lack of evidence backing it. Sebreli's arguments

are derived from a myth with roots in the 1945 electoral propaganda war and lack empirical support.

The great differences between the social composition of Peronism and the European fascisms have been recognized by all scholars on the subject. Occasionally there have been attempts to skirt the issue altogether, such as Hayes's bland assertion that "fascism can be popular," an unquestionable but banal statement that cannot erase the fact that diverse social bases shape the principal characteristics of political associations and movements. There is also Sebreli's facile thesis that resolves the entire question by asserting that the Argentine working class was and is the victim of a "self-deception." Arguments such as these are always difficult either to defend or refute, but what can be said is that Sebreli marshals little evidence to support them.¹⁴

Moving on to the ideological dimension, Fayt does not see anything but affinities between Peronism and fascism: their repudiation of liberalism, democracy, and Marxism; their nationalism and emphasis on a charismatic leadership, and their corporatism and stress on the values of "order, hierarchy, and discipline." 15 Thamer and Wippermann agree with the essentials of this argument, and Payne emphasizes what he considers to be the "fascist negations" of Perón, in addition to similar "philosophical and cultural values" and "expansionist goals." Sebreli is even more audacious, asserting that Perón's concept of the "organized community" drew its inspiration from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.¹⁶

A close study of Peronist ideology, however, shows that the differences between it and fascism are greater than their few similarities. The central components of *Justicialismo*-that is, of Peronist ideology-have roots in the Social Christianity and national populism of the FORJA (the *yrigoyenista*, the nationalist youth wing of the Radical Party in the 1930s), and in syndicalism. Moreover, this synthesis proved to be more resilient over time than many had assumed. In Peronism's formative stage, the irrational *vitalisme* ("life" philosophy) and Social Darwinism of fascism had minimal and no influence, respectively. With regard to Italian corporatism, which ended up replacing the unions and democratic elections, it cannot be seriously compared with the syndicalist element in Peronism.¹⁷ Peronism's presumed expansionist goals likewise are nowhere in evidence, and Sebreli's thesis does not stand up to the slightest analysis. The only similarity that can be acknowledged is the particular importance both ideologies granted to the concept of the leader.¹⁸

With regard to the characteristics of the movement and the regime, Hayes, Lewis, and Sebreli show themselves to be the most categorical in their affirmation of Peronism's Fascist nature. Their arguments contrast with the more diverse and nuanced interpretations of Thamer and Wippermann, Payne, Wynia, and Needler. Among this group, some speak of "concentration camps in the Patagonia" and of a "controlled violence" similar to that which existed in Italy and Germany.¹⁹ But Payne concludes that the regime was "eclectic," being rather "a government with a personal style of limited authoritarianism that tolerated pluralism to a considerable degree."²⁰

It is undeniable that during the period from 1946 to 1955, unlike the second Peronist government, from 1973 to 1976, there were certain similarities to fascism, especially with respect to the vast

propaganda machine and a certain totalitarian aspiration. But with regard to the repression of the opposition, the Peronist governments were much less severe than other twentieth-century regimes, such as those of generals José Uriburu (1930-1932), Pedro Aramburu (1955-1958), the *Onganiato* (1966-1970), and the *Proceso* (1976-1983). Whereas Italian fascism and German nazism destroyed the universal suffrage that had existed in those countries, Peronism on the other hand put an end to the systematic electoral fraud that had been practiced in Argentina between 1932 and 1943. There was no militarization of society, nor was public spending directed toward a massive arms buildup. Economic policy was *dirigiste*, but if state planning is an indicator of fascism, one would have to conclude that Mexico under Cárdenas and Great Britain under the Labour governments were also Fascist states. 21 The Peronist governments of 1946-1955 and 1973-1976 directed their efforts toward distributive and industrializing policies. What cannot be maintained is that they had either *revanchista* or expansionist programs.

The preceding arguments show the scant usefulness of the Fascist category in attempting to arrive at an adequate explanation of Peronism. This does not mean that one must deny the presence of fascistic elements in the Argentine or Latin American reality during the twentieth century. But that fact cannot be reduced to a simple equation of Peronism with fascism, a facile argument that too many times has been resorted to in order to overlook other factors when analyzing the persistence of antidemocratic tendencies in our continent.

Peronism and Socialism

Interpretations of Peronism as a variant of socialism flourished

during the 1970s and today have virtually disappeared, but not without leaving a note of confusion with regard to the valid question of whether Peronism was, sought to be, or might have once been a leftist, revolutionary movement. There are four basic interpretations. J. J. Hernández Arregui's argument, advanced in 1971, contends that the entire Peronist movement marched toward an ineluctable "ideological radicalization" that, surpassing the accomplishments of the period from 1946 to 1955 and leaving behind the movement's "petit-bourgeois tendencies," would culminate in a thoroughly Argentine socialism. That is what Norberto Galasso still appeared to be hoping for in 1983.²² A second thesis is that Peronism was nothing but a new name for a national variant of socialism,

without implying thereby that an ideological turn had taken place toward Marxism. This argument is supported by Perón's own writings. The third supposition is that in 1973 there existed the possibility of an evolution toward socialism, but that only a wing of the Peronist movement was committed to such a program. Even with that sector of the movement there were contradictions and ideological and organizational weaknesses. Boris and Hiedl advanced this idea in an important book in 1978, their arguments being echoed in a more recent book by Gasparini on the Montoneros.²³ A fourth thesis is that the "Argentine socialism" Perón had promised to the youth-"a revolution like Castro's or that which Allende was attempting"-later revealed itself to be a deception or a wilfull ambiguity. That is how Page dealt with the issue in his best-selling biography of Perón.²⁴

This topic needs to be studied more than it has been, but I will at least hazard a few ideas regarding the central question of the "national" socialism Perón espoused in the political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s. We must begin by recognizing that in standard political vocabulary, "socialism" does not mean simply the postulation of egalitarianism as an ideal, but also state acquisition of property or collective ownership of the means of production. If nothing else, Perón had always employed a fairly original political language in which every word acquired its meaning according to the context-that is, in relation to the remainder of the discourse and the experience of the times. Using that idea as a starting point, we soon notice that there never was "socialism" in the usual sense in Perón's proposals, as at no time did he advocate complete state ownership of industry or agrarian collectivization. Neither can the

FREJULI program (1973) or the Three-year Plan (1974) be fairly interpreted as socialistic.

What Perón proposed as "national socialism" was what for the European observer would be a variant of the mixed economy and of the welfare state, in which the unions played a prominent role. Given the breadth that he assigned his concept, Perón mentioned as examples such diverse phenomena as Nasserist Arab socialism, Scandinavian social democracy, as well as the defunct authoritarian regimes of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. But what he most emphasized from the years 1946-1955 was his thesis of the "organized community" as the first manifestation in Argentina of the twentieth-century's global phenomenon of "national socialism."²⁵ Perón repeatedly claimed that his version of "socialism" was not Marxist but Christian, that *Justicialismo* and a national variant of

socialism were the same thing, that the establishment of a more just social order could be bloodless, and that a centralization of all economic power in the hands of the state (in the manner of Eastern European socialism) would not lead to the liberation of humanity.

26 It is not that there were no changes in the Perón of the third presidency, but they were not the Marxist changes dreamed of by the disciples of John William Cooke or the Peronist left. Rather, there was a renewed emphasis on the idea of nonsectarian solutions. In his last important political statement, Perón renounced the use of the term "national socialism" because he had seen that his particular definition of the term had not managed to establish its dominance over the versions advanced by the more extremist wings of the movement. In its stead he proposed the idea of "social democracy," characterized by the harmonization of state planning with the market, along with political pluralism and a consultory corporatist representation.²⁷

The vision of Peronism's inexorable march toward socialism expressed by Juan José Hernández Arregui and in the Peronist left's slogan *Patria Socialista* (in contrast to the traditional *Patria Peronista*) did not manage to take root among the majority of Peronists-and it hardly reflected the social, economic, and cultural realities of Argentina. It created more confusion and conflicts than a meeting of minds, as Perón himself recognized when he abandoned "national socialism" as the movement's programmatic position.

The two interpretations reviewed in the preceding pages showed themselves, at the very latest by the early 1980s, to be unsatisfactory for explaining the dominant strain within and the

essence of Peronism, or the place Peronism occupied in recent Argentine history. "Fascism" and "socialism" can fairly be regarded from another perspective, as the schematic expression of two antithetical tendencies that once attempted to occupy the extreme fringes of this vast and many-sided popular movement. Indeed, these dogmatic philosophies have left traces in the ideological disputes of our own days. One of them is to be found in the stereotypical use of the term "corporatism" by some analysts, in this way attempting to evoke images of Mussolini's Italy to give credence to the old thesis that Peronism was essentially antidemocratic. Among other sectors of opinion, echoes of the "national socialism" interpretation seem to have survived in the vague idea that Peronism necessarily means a large number of state-owned companies and a vitriolically antiimperialist rhetoric. Nevertheless, it is not clear that these traits are inherent in the pursuit of what constitutes the objectives and

historical essence of this political phenomenon, which were summarized in 1989 as "a democracy with full social justice within a framework of sustained economic growth." 28

Peronism and Populism

The moment has arrived to consider the third of the interpretative categories used to understand Peronism, that which places it within the broad rubric of twentieth-century popular Latin American political movements. In recent decades this has appeared as the preponderant "ideal type" in the historical and political studies devoted to the subject. But when one takes the time to review these often repetitive interpretations, one notices that the paradigm of populism does not provide an immediate solution to the problems posed by the earlier categorizations but rather constitutes, in turn, a vast polemical field within which reappear the principal protagonists of Argentina's contemporary conflicts.

The aforesaid review requires an attempt to order the various opposing camps. If we were to restrict ourselves to extreme academic purism, we would eliminate from our analysis some authors whose work does not fit neatly into the typical canons of academic scholarship. Such a comfortable alternative has been abandoned here because it would impoverish our analysis. The foreign reader might think that the question of populism could be reduced to a debate among intellectuals, when in reality it has never lost all its links to the dramatic struggle for the strengthening of democracy in Argentina. It is for that reason that I propose analyzing the debate from several highly polemical perspectives that show a possible use of the ideal type as a conceptual instrument employed in the fight for political power. It should be

emphasized that we are considering a concept that refuses to disappear from public debate.

The first perspective is Peronism's self-interpretation during the most troubled periods of its history, during which Peronism has seen itself as representing the contemporary values of the people. In contrast, another point of view has interpreted the Peronist phenomenon as "populist," an obstacle to progress, and a lamentable detour from the country's "correct" historical development. As a third concept it is necessary to consider the strictly academic interpretations characterized by greater detachment and more receptivity to dialogue, although there are widely varying perspectives within that group as well. Moreover, it should be recognized that to

a certain point the scholarly debate has refined and reshaped elements that have emerged out of the political controversy.

Peronism's traditional self-interpretation can be traced to many writings, including some of Perón's very own. In 1950, Perón proclaimed that "*Justicialismo* [was] in essence popular"; following the 1955 coup, he noted that this was a new chapter in the struggle between the "*pueblo* and the *antipueblo*, the former struggling for independence and the latter part of a historically colonialist tradition." Peronism represented the people, confronting the "colonialism and prejudices of the entrenched oligarchy." Finally, Perón explicitly recognized the essential affinity of his movement to similar ones elsewhere in Latin America that were generally characterized as "popular," "populist," or "for the worker." 29 One version of this interpretation is still to be found in the writings of some later observers. In 1982, Juan Labaké asserted that "there have been two projects fighting for supremacy in Argentina for many years. Perhaps since independence. Two visions of the kind of nation it should be, neither of which has been totally achieved."30

With a historical lineage to Saavedra, San Martín, Rosas, and Yrigoyen, Peronism represented "the greatest and most complete attempt to realize the national-popular project" in contrast to the "oligarchical project," which would count among its predecessors Moreno, Rivadavia, the *antirosistas*, and conservative liberalism. This dualism is somewhat tempered by the recognition of the existence of an intermediary group, oscillating between "the two Argentinas," but that fact does not fundamentally alter Labaké's arguments.

An interpretation of Peronist populism as an obstacle to national progress is actually expressed in two forms whose only common denominator is the previously mentioned negative assessment of the movement. For some authors, Argentine populism, and Latin American populism generally, has been an impediment that has misdirected the masses from their normal path toward the acquisition of a class identity and organization-that is, toward socialism. According to Winocur and Altman, populism was nothing more than a "creature" of "the industrial bourgeoisie," designed "to manipulate" the workers. Its reforms were never more than "superficial," being marred by a "paternalist" charisma easily assimilated by the "ideology of the peasant" held by Argentina's "new proletariat" of the 1940s.³¹ With that premise, any resurgence of Peronism was considered a "renewed impediment" to "the process of the social and political emancipation of the Argentine working class."³²

Whereas the preceding perspective has its greatest following within certain intellectual circles, the "liberal-conservative" view achieved its greatest dissemination during and after the 1970s. It was the official doctrine of the military governments of the *Proceso* (1976-1983), at which time it was promoted by the powerful tool of the mass media. The Videla military dictatorship declared its intention to protect the populace from a "demagogic and anarchic populism." The thesis was that Peronism constituted one of the greatest obstacles in the advance toward a real "republic" (democracy was not spoken about with the same enthusiasm) and a flourishing market economy. Numerous writings by Mariano Grondona, republished in 1983, constitute the most representative expressions of this school of thought. The following is one example:

We could define the populist formula in the following way: a charismatic and industrializing demagoguery. . . . But, and this is the most serious thing, this charismatic demagoguery was implemented during a period of industrialization, that is, when the country most needed policies which favored accumulation, entrepreneurship, investments, for which Argentina, with its system of favoritism, was not prepared. Perhaps Peronism would have worked in a strictly agrarian country by continuously expropriating the surplus of the landowners. At any rate, it could not work in an industrializing country which perforce requires a rational use of its surplus. 33

There are many similarities between this image of an antidevelopmentalist Peronism and the assessment of David Rock with regard to Perón's "corporatist project," which he disparagingly says was backed by "consumerist groups" and was opposed to Argentina's "pluralist order."³⁴

The interpretations of Peronism summarized above clearly do not

mark a great advance in illuminating a question that requires a sober historiography and a political science worthy of the name. To varying degrees, all these interpretations are excessively subjective, display a strong tendency toward a dualist reductionism, and suffer from a lack of empirical rigor. In reality, what they make clear at a purely discursive level is the highly fragmented, conflicting, and polarized nature of Argentine political life, especially during the period from 1955 to 1983. Many of the protagonists in these conflicts believed deeply in the ideas presented above, but would they have been able to continue to believe them if they had taken more time for critical reflection?

With regard to Peronism's self-interpretation, it is worth noting that in his final statements Perón himself abandoned the dualism of the *pueblo y antipueblo*, recognizing the need for political

pluralism within the framework of the constitution. As I have noted in another work, 35 it is impossible to reduce the complex weave of Argentina's historical-political reality to the interaction of only two forces. Besides Peronism and liberal conservatism, for some time there have existed socialist, liberal-democratic, and conservative nationalist traditions whose internal evolution and changing relationship to the two main political forces constitute the fractious battleground that is contemporary Argentina.

The pejorative Marxist interpretation of Peronism rests on a supposition regarding the existence of a "normal" and universal path in the historical development of the working class. There is not enough space here to consider such an important question, but what can be noted is that such an assertion is a mere hypothesis—greatly weakened, moreover, in light of the events of the past decade. No less problematic, and all the more questionable given the lack of empirical support, is the argument regarding supposed bourgeois manipulations in the origins of populism, an idea that reveals a certain pedantry on the part of authors who underestimate the capacity of the common man to articulate his self-interest.

With respect to the interpretation represented by Grondona, its intent to serve as an apology for the 1976 military coup is quite apparent. His interpretation is characterized by unsupportable affirmations, beginning with the outlandish thesis that the *estancieros* are an exploited class in Argentina and continuing with the shopworn myth of a spendthrift, antiaccumulative populism. In fact, between 1946 and 1955 the average growth of the gross domestic product was 3.8 percent annually, whereas during the following twelve years, without Peronist governments, it was 3.4

percent. Other extremely eloquent figures emerge from an analysis of the relationship between gross domestic investment and the gross domestic product. Between 1945 and 1960, for example, this relationship increased on average 7.7 percent a year, whereas between 1975 and 1987 it declined to a rate of 3.7 percent. It was this latter period, when Peronist populism was not in power, that was characterized by disinvestment and deindustrialization.³⁶

The moment has arrived to consider those studies that have attempted to demystify the term "populism" so that it can be used to understand Latin American phenomena. In this light, Pühle's criticisms of the recent tendency to use the term in a deprecatory fashion hold particular relevance, as does his demand that it be used "in an analytical way and as an abstract typology."³⁷ The approaches employed by Ionescu and Gellner, Germani, Coniff, Pühle, Di Tella,

and Chumbita, to name only the most representative, do not rest on the same political foundations but do respect the methodological imperative noted above. The net result of this scholarship has been a significant advance in our understanding of populism in its Latin American context, providing a more objective and nuanced profile of the populist phenomenon, and one that moreover rests on a more solid empirical base than that offered by the antinomial interpretations discussed above. How is populism seen today? By way of a summary, this is the verdict with regard to six analytical categories, stressing the principal points of agreement:

The "Classic" Period of Populism.

Some authors prefer to trace its origins to the 1920s, but in general the years 1930 to 1960 form the recognized classic period. 38

The Standard Models.

The comparative study of Vargasismo in Brazil, Cardenismo in Mexico, and Peronismo in Argentina generally offer the most interesting cases, although this does not imply disregarding other examples, such as the Partido Aprista in Peru and the MNR in Bolivia.³⁹

The Economic Dimension.

The consensus tends to revolve around a characterization of the economic policies of populism as reformist, seeking to consolidate a national capitalism with an interventionist state in pursuit of a program of import-substitutive industrialization.⁴⁰

The Social Base.

Populism in Latin America is supported by many economic classes, with Peronism being distinguished by the notable weight of the working class in its populist alliance. Populist governments tend to give the lower classes access to participation in various spheres of modern society.⁴¹

The Political Characterization of the Movements and the Regimes.

Charismatic leaderships with varying degrees of authoritarianism are combined with electoral practices.⁴²

Characterization of the Ideology.

It appears eclectic and atypical when compared with the classic European models. Above all, two central characteristics stand out: a defensive nationalism (not an aggressive one, such as that found in Europe between the wars) and a rather inorganic and essentialist interpretation of democracy.⁴³

Despite the points of agreement, it would be incorrect to present this interpretative group, which employs populism in a descriptive and not an objectivist-Manichaeian way, as a homogeneous "school" that has resolved all the problems that the diverse national cases pose. It is more accurate to visualize their work as a kind of shared

territory in which the various analysts develop their own perspectives while remaining open to the interpretative advances made by their colleagues. There remain disagreements and controversies of considerable importance, which in the specific case of Peronism revolve especially around the typology issue, the role of the working class, the precise characterization of its ideology, and its influence beyond the movement's "classic" period (1946-1955). We would have to add the dispute that for several decades has revolved around Peronism's economic policies, but the complexity of that question has converted it into a problem reserved almost exclusively for economists, and it therefore will not figure in the analysis that follows.

The subject of the typologies of Peronism reflects the natural differences that exist in the special focus of each of the scholars. Ernesto Laclau took great pains to point out that there was a certain dose of populism in the European varieties of fascism, but he drew a basic distinction between those "populisms of the dominant class" and those of the "dominated class," among which he includes in general the leftist movements in the Third World and, in a vaguer way, the movements formed by those who oppose the "power bloc." He categorizes Peronism as a bourgeois variation of this second type of populism. 44 Hans-Jurgen Pühle prefers to speak of an "authoritarian" variant (Peronism until 1955), for example, and another, a "democratic" variant, both being able to occur at different moments in the development of the same movement.45 Torcuato Di Tella takes as a differentiating criterion the social structure by placing on one side the "populist parties of the middle class" (the Aprista and the MNR) and on the other the

"working class populist parties," among which are included Peronism and Brazilian *trabalhismo*.⁴⁶

A definitive answer does not seem necessary here. The three typologies are useful to the degree that we recognize their limitations, which arise from the fact they convey only partial aspects of the phenomenon. With respect to Laclau, the most interesting feature of his analysis is his capacity to differentiate between the concept of the "people," as fascism employs the term, from that of the anticolonialist nationalisms. Di Tella's focus contributes a salutary sociological precision to the debate and undeniably permits a more objective perspective on the entire question. The strictly political-institutional approach used by Pühle is an old but fascinating one that merits additional reflections. There is a certain paradox in this classification that to a degree is easy to understand. The Peronism

in power in the 1950s imposed restrictions on the opposition and on dissent, but, incorporating other points of view, this typology becomes fuzzy.

On the one hand, one notices the distance between the theoretical requirements of democracy and its actual practice. This does not constitute so much a trait of Argentine populism as it does a chronic characteristic of Argentine national life since 1930, and especially after 1955. On the other hand, "democracy" also implies the full participation of the lower socioeconomic groups in contemporary public life, and from that viewpoint Juan Carlos Torre employs the surprising definition of the origins of Peronism (1944-1946) as a "process of democratization through authoritarian means." Although apparently contradictory, this formula puts the finger on something very real-the fundamental idea of democracy that has predominated in what Daniel García Delgado has called the "popular tradition." In that tradition, democracy is above all the more equitable distribution of power and improvement in wages, working conditions, and educational opportunities that made possible a fuller life. The Peronism in power between 1973 and 1976 was not a repetition of the intolerant practices of the period from 1950 to 1955. Yet the fundamental political division remained: For the liberal-conservative tradition, democracy had to be reduced to the separation of the three constitutional powers and the sanctity of private property, whereas Peronism continued to stress the concept of democracy summarized above.

From this viewpoint, the great political problem in Argentina has not been the supposed impermeability of an "authoritarian populism" to democratic influences, but the lack of a synthesis

between a formal-institutional vision and a "real" and social definition of democracy. What did exist for many years, on the other hand, was a bitter polarization that virtually divided the country. 47

The role of the working class within Peronism has always provoked rather widely diverging interpretations. No one denies its importance, but questions remain regarding the reasons for the working class's deep Peronist identity. In studies from the 1960s support for a charismatic leader tended to be emphasized, a concept to which other somewhat atavistic and even irrational elements were added that supposedly characterized the rural migrants recently incorporated into urban and industrial life. Winocur and Altman have been mentioned as authors who represented this idea. It is also one that dominates, albeit in more measured tones, the classic study developed by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner. An image

thus emerges of masses simply manipulated. More recent studies have demonstrated the incorporation into Peronism of many leaders and trade union activists with considerable previous union experience, something that does not lend credence to the irrationalist argument. What is certainly true is that we now better understand the complexity of the sociocultural and political-economic factors that compelled the enthusiastic and long-lasting response of the workers to Perón's call during the crucial period from 1943 to 1946. Beyond all that can be attributed to government propaganda, it remains irrefutable that concrete benefits were achieved in those years. It is interesting to remember that the sociologist Gino Germani, hardly a Peronist sympathizer, ended up by recognizing that the workers had achieved a sense of "real freedom completely unknown and impossible before the establishment of the nationalist-populist regime." And although Germani considered a liberal-democratic road preferable for the country, he pointed out that the lower classes did not act in an irrational manner by following Perón in Argentina in the 1940s. 48

When trying to characterize Peronist ideology with some precision, unavoidable disagreements arise. For Emilio de Ipola, authors such as Laclau attributed greater coherence to Peronism than it really possessed. For him, it was a collection of elements in a "weak and potentially explosive" partnership, an assessment that fits into the earlier works of A. Hennessy and K. Minogue.⁴⁹ At this level of generalization, it becomes a bit difficult to study the question in depth because what we are dealing with is an attempt to ascertain which are Peronism's central and strongly intertwined ideological components and which the ones that occupy a rather marginal position in the movement. In this sense, I think that one of the most

important contributions to the debate was offered by Torcuato Di Tella in his 1973 analysis of Peronism, in which he differentiates between "four generating ideological groups," emphasizing the relative force of the "classic core" of Peronism.⁵⁰ Hugo Chumbita and Daniel García Delgado have also made valuable contributions to this subject; readers will notice the points of agreement between these latter three authors and my own work. This is not the appropriate place to develop my own thesis. I have attempted to point out here what was already taking shape in the Peronism of the 1950s: the tension between a conservative-fascistic right wing, a social Christian-syndicalist center, and a Socialist left wing. If one follows its trajectory until the 1980s, the primacy of the Christian-syndicalist tendency within Peronism is clear.⁵¹

Finally there is posed the problem of temporal framework. If the classic period of Latin American populism does not extend beyond the 1960s, how should we interpret the political importance of Peronism in the first half of the 1970s and its resurgence at the end of the 1980s? This resiliency was not foreseen by the majority of scholars. In 1969, Minogue saw populisms in general as mere "umbrellas which are discarded once the skies have cleared"; and, in 1982, David Tamarin opined that populist politics in Argentina were already a thing of the past.⁵² Naturally, there have been a number of authors who have pointed out the mistake in confusing specific stages in the historical development of this political phenomenon with its entire trajectory. Already in 1985 Teresa Carballal and Roberto Russell, in drawing a perceptive picture of the problems surrounding redemocratization in Argentina, expressed their conviction that Peronism would continue to play an important role.⁵³ This in no way justifies the naive supposition that Peronism constitutes some kind of historical "bloc" capable of existing for decades without its characteristics undergoing some transformation. It is thus necessary to agree with the following assessment of N. Carrizo de Muñoz with regard to the Latin American populisms in general: "I believe we cannot assert that populism is disappearing but rather what is coming to an end are certain characteristics which defined it during an historical stage (authoritarianism, paternalism, corporatism, opposition to democracy, for example) and a patent tendency toward the transformation of its basic mode of operating which brings it closer to a convergence of populism and democracy."⁵⁴

With these words, the author is referring to the reconciliation between the substantive and formal conceptions of democracy, a

question mentioned in earlier paragraphs. In the Argentine case, the coexistence of radicals and Peronists during the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), successful solidarity in the face of coup attempts, and the peaceful transfer of power from one constitutionally elected president to another for the first time in many years give credence to this interpretation.

Transformations and Open Questions in the Nineties

Carlos Menem's victory in the 1995 presidential elections meant that the stage of Peronism begun in 1989 is still under way.

Therefore, no historical interpretation of this third experience of Peronism can be given at this moment. We lack the perspective and a bal-

anced use of sources that only time will provide, but we can undertake a tentative sketch of the outlines of the principal problems of contemporary Peronism. Hugo Chumbita presents them in the following way.

The distance between populism's historical program and the government that came to power in July 1989 reveals a clear and deep conflict. Once again, as in 1973, the contradictions of the political conjuncture have taken root in the heart of Peronism and are projected into the state apparatus. The "conversion" realized by the movement's leadership raises again the question of Peronism's ideological evolution. Are the interests that express the neo-liberal project compatible with the popular majorities within Peronism? Is the synthesis between populism and liberalism that President Carlos Menem favors possible? 55

Another way of posing this question is by recognizing that a strong tension exists between the historical identity of Peronism and contemporary trends; hence the political movement seems obliged at this juncture to undertake a deep ideological and practical modernization. The awareness of its identity, the force that maintains the cohesion of any political group, is closely related to the memory of a period of common reference, generally the founding stage, and the group's most notable achievements. For the Peronists, such a period was the decade from 1945 to 1955. It was then that Peronism, regardless of its acknowledged mistakes and excesses, gave a social meaning to the juridical-institutional scaffolding of a would-be democratic republic that previously had been more formal than real. The economic system went on to

become an inclusionary capitalism, thanks to the intervention of the welfare state.

Problems became apparent following the 1975 economic crisis, problems that had been gestating for some time and that came together to destroy the pillars of the system. In the era of informatics, a country with some 32 million inhabitants cannot rest its future on the combination of agricultural exports, which cannot provide sufficient employment, and an industry that could but that has become accustomed to living off of subsidies and comfortable state contracts. The irresponsible foreign debt, financial speculation, capital flight, and, above all, a regressive fiscal system based on consumption taxes ended up obstructing the original function of the welfare state-that is, its role as a redistributive mechanism in the service of social justice. In the last two decades, the welfare state has turned into a bureaucracy that functions to increase the income

of the most monopolistic sectors of the economy. And those sectors have created a capitalism ever more peripheral, stagnant, and socially exclusive.

Faced with this new situation, there has occurred in the heart of Peronism a positive reassessment of the market's role and an awareness that the objective of a more socially just Argentina cannot be attained by the political machinations of the state, but that a "productive revolution" and the reconstruction of a "culture of work" are needed.⁵⁶ These were the points of agreement that underlay the Peronist triumph of 1989. The disagreements emerged later regarding concrete policy decisions by the government.

Dissident sectors of Peronism, now allied with other groupings of the moderate left in FREPASO (Frente para el País Solidario), argue that these policies endanger the objectives of social justice, tending to crystallize the inefficient, corrupt, and elitist brand of capitalism that has been characteristic of the last twenty years. For their part, most of the traditional Peronist voters, together with a very substantial part of the electorate not committed to a particular party, have chosen to renew their confidence in President Menem. Out of conviction or fear that doing otherwise would mean a leap into the unknown, they accepted the government's explanation that the present difficulties are an externally caused accident, but one that could open the way toward more soundly based growth and better distribution of wealth in the near future.

In Argentina, as in other parts of Latin America and the world, the late eighties and early nineties were characterized as an era of ideological exhaustion and disenchantment. Even so, polemics about the identity and historical continuity of Peronism have

continued to flare up from time to time, although they are frequently distorted by personal and political rivalries, only rarely showing analytical rigor or depth. On the critical side, both dissident Peronists and some outside observers speak of an "ideological emptying" and the shameless use of "neoliberal" or "neoconservative" policies-of following the "Thatcher model"-represented in Argentina by the Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD) and its leader, Alvaro Alsogaray. President Menem and other representatives of the Justicialist Party defended themselves by arguing that the new economic policy, with its receptivity to private enterprise, has its roots in Perón's speeches and actions during his second term (1952-1955). Moreover, they see no basic contradiction with the 1989 electoral platform. For them, the governing Peronism of the nineties is the "modern" version of the movement's tradition and of its universal

foundations: that is, the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, incorporating "pragmatic" adaptations to the technological, economic, and political changes that define the present post-Cold War world. In other words, the reduction of state intervention, greater privatization, fiscal austerity, and strong ties with the United States should all be interpreted as new instruments and methods for the attainment of the permanent goals of Peronism. 57

The question of historical continuity can be clarified if we consider present-day Peronism in relation to the analytical categories used previously in the characterization of Latin American varieties of national populism. The most radical changes appear in the area of economic policy, where the era of state-owned firms and strongly protectionist import-substituting industrialization is a thing of the past. Even so, the free market rhetoric of the nineties cannot hide the fact that vital areas of Argentina's industry-automobiles, for example-operate in a rather corporatist framework, with the trilateral participation of entrepreneurs, the workers' union, and the government. On the other hand, the continuity of the social base of Peronism is quite evident, although even here some novelties appear, with the incorporation of most of the business community. In electoral terms, the massive voter turnout of Perón's days is unlikely to return. In the presidential elections of 1946, 1951, and 1973, the founder of the movement polled 52, 62, and 61 percent of the vote; between 1989 and 1995, Peronism rose from a very respectable but hardly hegemonic 47 to 50 percent of the vote. President Menem exhibits some of the charismatic leadership style generally associated with populism, but the fact that Domingo Cavallo, his technocratic minister of economic affairs for most of the president's first term, equaled him and sometimes had much

higher ratings in public opinion polls is without precedent. In the ideological terrain, continuity and change coexist side by side in an uneasy relationship. In any case, the disappearance of the fascistoid and Socialist wings has simplified both internal debates and the public image of the third Peronism-especially if we compare it with the terrible tensions of the seventies.

Argentine political debate has now abandoned much of the obsessive use of the ill-defined and apocalyptic alternatives of the Cold War era, such as "liberation or dependency," "anti-imperialism versus imperialism," "Christian civilization against Marxist subversion." Debates and political dividing lines are now related to more prosaic matters, such as the evolution of the GNP, the purchasing power of salaries, balance of payments problems, taxes,

the structure of the federal budget, the quality of the educational system, and the alarming rise of unemployment. Until the end of 1994, government circles shared the view that the stabilization of the Argentine currency and the renewal of growth meant that there was no legitimate reason to express concerns or criticisms about economic policy. But recently a less triumphalist attitude has spread. In the 1995 electoral campaign, Menem revived a traditional element of Peronism, proposing a five-year plan with active state policies to fight unemployment, thus partially returning to the social emphasis that characterized the first and second experiences with Peronism. There is a growing awareness both inside and outside Peronism that certain structural tensions exist, deriving from often conflicting interactions between two material realities-the globalized market and the interests of the populace in a semi-industrialized country-and two ideal aspirations, embodied in secularist democratic principles and Judeo-Christian social ethics.

Even if radical socialist or rightist-authoritarian alternatives presently remain discredited, as seems to be the case, the above-mentioned tensions would provide enough fuel for political conflict, no less in theory than in practice. As an example of potential tensions we have the frequently critical comments of some bishops regarding the social consequences of the government's economic policies. There is no doubt that the heaviest costs of economic recovery and of adjustment in the early nineties were paid by the wage-earning sector, together with small- and medium-size firms in the provinces. 58 Will they get a fairer share of the GNP and better opportunities in the second half of this decade? Will unemployment shrink back to more tolerable levels? In other words, will Argentina be able to build a more manageable

relationship between the conflicting interests of a Latin American society in a supposedly postideological age? Can a really inclusive or "humanized" capitalism take root in the harsh environment of these times, when a kind of Social Darwinism has been resurrected in some influential circles? These questions are still open. There are reasons both for hope, based on some real achievements, and for concern, when other factors are taken into account.⁵⁹

Notes

1. Gary W. Wynia, *Argentina: Illusions and Realities* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986), p. 52.

2. Hugo Chumbita, *El enigma peronista* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1989), p. 19.
3. Carlos Fayt, *La naturaleza del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Viracocha, 1967); Paul M. Hayes, *Fascism* (New York: Free Press, 1973); Paul H. Lewis, "Was Perón a Fascist?" *Journal of Politics* 42, no. 1 (February 1980): 246-50; Juan José Sebreli, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1983); Wynia, *Argentina: Illusions and Realities*.
4. A. F. K. Organski, *The Stages of Political Development* (New York: Knopf, 1965); Hans U. Thamer and Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschistische und neofaschistische Bewegungen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977); Stanley Payne, *El fascismo*, Spanish trans. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1982); M. C. Needler, *The Problem of Democracy in Latin America* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1987).
5. Fayt, *La naturaleza del peronismo*, p. 15.
6. Hayes, *Fascism*, p. 201.
7. Sebreli, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo*, p. 24.
8. Payne, *El fascismo*, pp. 177, 179.
9. Helgio Trindade, "La cuestión del fascismo en América Latina," *Desarrollo Económico* 23, no. 91 (October-December 1983): 445-46.
10. See Cristián Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1987), pp. 18-24; Bernt Hagtvet and Reinhard Kühn, "Contemporary Approaches to Fascism: A Survey

of Paradigms," in *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism*, ed. S. U. Larsen et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 27; and Payne, *El fascismo*, p. 214.

11. Thamer and Wippermann, *Faschistische*, p. 81; Hayes, *Fascism*, p. 202; Sebreli, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo*, p. 51.

12. Mark Falcoff, in "Was War der Peronismus von 1946 bis 1955," in *Berichte zur Entwicklung in Spanien, Portugal und Lateinamerika* 1, no. 4 (March-April 1976), also makes this point.

13. Organski, *Stages of Political Development*, p. 139.

14. Hayes, *Fascism*, p. 201; Sebreli, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo*, pp. 117-18.

15. Fayt, *La naturaleza del peronismo*, p. 15.

16. Sebreli, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo*, p. 55.

17. This question has been studied in G. Pasquino, "Regímenes corporativos excluyentes y modelo corporativo," *Revista Chile-América* 70-71 (April-June 1981).

18. For his part, Hayes insists on seeing ongoing similarities in ideologies as well.

19. Hayes, *Fascism*, pp. 197, 199; Lewis, "Was Perón a Fascist?" pp. 247-49, 255.

20. Payne, *El fascismo*, pp. 176-77.

21. For bibliographic references that address this question see Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo*, p. 398, n. 10.

22. Juan José Hernández Arregui, *Peronismo y socialismo* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1971); Norberto Galasso, *La Izquierda Nacional*

y el FIP (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1983).

23. D. Boris and P. Hiedl, *Argentinien: Geschichte und Politische Gegenwart* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1978); Juan Gasparini, *Montoneros: Final de Cuentas* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1988), p. 52.

24. Joseph A. Page, *Perón: Una biografía* (Buenos Aires: Javier Vergara Editor, 1984).

25. See various sections in Juan Domingo Perón, *Latinoamérica, ahora o nunca* (Montevideo: Síntesis, 1967) and *La hora de los pueblos* (1968; reprint ed., Buenos Aires: Pleamar, 1973).
26. Numerous sections in Perón's above cited works. See also *Los vendepatria* (Caracas: Freeland, 1957); *Actualización política y doctrinaria para la roma del poder* (interviews with Perón by F. Solanas and O. Getino) (Madrid: n.p., 1971), and *El Diario Secreto de Perón* (annotated by E. Pavón Pereyra), 2d ed. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana/Planeta, 1986).
27. The idea had already appeared in his "Carta al Presidente Kennedy" in 1961. See also numerous sections of Juan Domingo Perón, *El Proyecto Nacional* (1974; reprint ed., Buenos Aires: El Cid Editor, 1981).
28. This is found in a central paragraph in Peronism's 1989 electoral program.
29. Juan Domingo Perón, "Las veinte verdades del justicialismo," republished in *La tercera posición argentina* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1973), p. 120; *Los vendepatria*, pp. 221, 223; E. P. Rom, *Así hablaba Juan Perón* (Buenos Aires: A. Peña Lillo Editor, 1980).
30. Juan Labaké, *Carta a los noperonistas* (Buenos Aires: 1982), p. 14.
31. W. Airman et al., *El populismo en América Latina* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1983), pp. 31-42, 43-95.
32. Boris and Hiedl, *Argentinien*, p. 181.

33. Mariano Grondona, *La construcción de la democracia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1983), pp. 306-7.
34. See David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 317, 378.
35. See Cristián Buchrucker, "Unidad y diversidad en las corrientes internas del justicialismo," in *Racionalidad del peronismo*, ed. José Enrique Miguens and Frederick C. Turner (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1988), pp. 60-61.
36. For these and other figures on the economic and social development of contemporary Argentina, consult Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo*, p. 360; and Aldo Ferrer, *El devenir de una ilusión: La industria argentina desde 1930 hasta nuestros días* (Buenos Aires: El Cid Editor, 1989), table 2, p. 194.
37. See E. Torreani Cuevas and J. L. Simón, "Nacionalismo, populismo y reforma o revolución en América Latina: Un coloquio con el Dr. Hans-Jurgen Pühle de la Universidad de Bielefeld, Rep. Fed. de Alemania," *Revista Paraguaya de Sociología* 23, no. 65 (January-April 1986): 103.
38. See among others, Michael L. Conniff, ed., *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); and N. Carrizo de Muñoz, "Balance crítico sobre el populismo: Análisis teórico," in *Revista de Historia Americana y Argentina* 14, nos. 27-28 (1988).
39. As in Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*; Carrizo de Muñoz, "Balance crítico"; and Chumbita, *El enigma peronista*.
40. P. Worsley, "El concepto de populismo," in *Populismo: Sus*

significados y características nacionales, comp. G. Ionescu and E. Gellner (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1970); Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*; Chumbita, *El enigma peronista*.

41. Gino Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978); Conniff, *Latin American Populism*; Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*; Chumbita, *El enigma peronista*.

42. Gino Germani and A. Sewart, "Las raíces sociales," in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populismo*; Conniff, *Latin American Populism*; Chumbita, *El enigma peronista*.
43. Torcuato Di Tella, "Populismo," in *Diccionario de ciencias sociales y políticas*, ed. Torcuato Di Tella, P. Gajardo, S. Gamba, and H. Chumbita (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1989); Daniel García Delgado, *Raíces cuestionadas: la tradición popular y la democracia*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1989); Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo*; and idem "Unidad y diversidad."
44. Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: New Left Books, 1977).
45. Torreani and Simón, "Nacionalismo, populismo y reforma."
46. Torcuato Di Tella, *Sociología de los procesos políticos* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1985), pp. 327-38.
47. On the complex question of the democratic and authoritarian tendencies in Peronism see Germani, *Authoritarianism*; Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo*; García Delgado, *Raíces*; and Juan Carlos Torre, "Interpretando (una vez más) los orígenes del peronismo," *Desarrollo Económico* 28, no. 112 (January-March 1989): 525-48.
48. Germani, *Authoritarianism*, pp. 116-17, 237.
49. Published in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populismo*. See also Emilio de Ipola, "Ruptura y continuidad: Claves parciales para un balance de las interpretaciones del peronismo," *Desarrollo Económico* 29, no. 115 (October-December 1989): 352.

50. Di Tella, *Sociología*, pp. 393-98.

51. See Buchrucker, "Unidad y diversidad."

52. K. Minogue, "El populismo como movimiento político," in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populismo*; David Tamarin, "Yrigoyen and Perón: The Limits of Argentine Populism," in Conniff, *Latin American Populism*.

53. See Teresa Carballal and Roberto Russell, "Democracia y autoritarismo en Argentina: Obstáculos a la redemocratización," in *La transición a la democracia en América Latina*, comp. F. Orrego Vacuña (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor de América Latina, 1985).

54. N. Carrizo de Muñoz, "Balance Crítico," p. 111.

55. Chumbita, *El enigma peronista*, p. 155.

56. These two ideas were strongly emphasized in the 1989 electoral campaign and have been a recurring theme in President Menem's speeches since then.

57. As representative publications of the official thesis about a balanced relationship between historical continuity and doctrinal modernization, the following can be mentioned: Carlos Menem, *La esperanza y la acción* (collected speeches) (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1990); Carlos Menem and R. Dromi, *Reforma del estado y transformación nacional* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Ciencias de la Administración, 1990); J. C. Maqueda, "El peronismo," in *La ideología contemporánea*, ed. C. A. Juárez Centeno and M. S. Bonetto de Scandogliero (Córdoba: Advocatus, 1992). Different shades of a strongly critical view of the recent changes in Peronism can be seen in V. Sukup, *El peronismo y la economía mundial* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1993); Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve historia contemporánea de la Argentina* (Buenos

Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994); and in Chapter 6 of this volume, Vicente Palermo, "The Origins of *Menemismo*."

58. A recent article gives a short but good overview of these social and economic problems. See Juan Corradi, "Memen's Argentina, Act II," *Current*

History 94, no. 589 (February 1995): 76-80. Rather surprisingly, the author finishes the article with a reference to the "ever latent irrationality" of the Peronist Party. The analytical usefulness of such an assessment is not too convincing.

59. To mention some encouraging signs: Inflation fell from 5,648 percent (June 1989-90) to 3.7 percent (June 1995), and the GNP, which in 1989 declined 15 percent, rose 7 percent in 1994. On the other side of the coin, unemployment rose between 1989 and 1994, from 8.7 percent to 11.5 percent, and is expected to reach as high as 20 percent in 1995. Real salaries fell from a comparative index of 123 in 1989 to 93 in 1995. See *Clarín*, July 9, 1995.

2

The Changing Perceptions of Peronism: A Review Essay

Mariano Plotkin

The triumph of Peronism in Argentina's 1989 presidential election, the spectacular ideological and political *volte-face* that President Carlos Menem subsequently gave to his government, and his new and equally spectacular electoral success in 1995 put the Peronist phenomenon once again on the main agenda of scholars and intellectuals interested in Argentina. Questions about the nature of Peronism, its ability to adapt to Argentine political reality, its transformations, and its place in the Argentine political system-questions all addressed in this volume-became pertinent once more. It is true that the classic "Peronist Era" in Argentine history seems to have ended, and now it is possible to look at the Peronist phenomenon, as Tulio Halperin Donghi has recently suggested, as a closed chapter.¹ However, it is also more clear than ever that it is impossible to understand Argentina's historical development over the last fifty years-or its contemporary situation-without taking Peronism into account. After all, it is a president who calls himself a Peronist that is giving a mortal blow to Perón's heritage.

For almost half a century, Peronism has been the *bête noire* of Argentine politics, as well as something of an enigma. Peronism, its development and metamorphosis, has been one of the most-although not always the best-studied phenomena of twentieth-century Argentina. Divergent interpretations of Peronism gave rise

to seemingly never-ending debates. In fact, as one historian has recently suggested, it would be possible to write a history of contemporary Argentine intellectuals simply by focusing on different interpretations of Peronism.² The purpose of this essay is to review the main interpretations of the first Peronism (1943-1955) and those

that have emerged since Perón was overthrown in 1955. 3 It is not, indeed could not be, an exhaustive review of all the studies of Peronism that have been published in the last forty years. Rather, it will focus on those works that have broken new ground or offered particularly interesting perspectives in the analysis of this complex question.⁴

After Perón's fall in September 1955, Argentines were faced with the need to explain to themselves the previous ten years of their history. Peronism had divided Argentine society into two irreconcilable camps. During the years of his government, Perón had polarized Argentine society as no other political leader in the twentieth century had done. Moreover, the practical consequences of ten years of Peronist rule allowed for conflicting interpretations. For the vast majority of the working class, the ten years of Peronist rule had meant a real improvement in their living conditions through a notable redistribution of income, their incorporation into the political system and into the state apparatus, as well as the reformulation (in their favor) of old patterns of social relations with other sectors of society. But for those other sectors of society, and particularly for the middle class and non-Peronist intellectuals, Peronism had been a very traumatic experience.

This trauma was the result not only of the concrete experiences of repression and censorship that they had suffered but also, and perhaps more important, the fact that Peronism seemed to be something that did not fit into the normal pattern of Argentine history; it was seen as a pathology. This perception contributed toward generating, in the words of Raymond Williams, a "structure of feeling" evident in some literary works in which the Peronist era

was viewed as essentially an aberration and therefore impossible to understand rationally.⁵ This structure of feeling is apparent in some works of fiction published during the years of the Peronist government, including a few even published during the period of Perón's rise to power, such as Ezequiel Martínez Estrada's *Sábado de gloria* or Julio Cortázar's obviously allegorical *El examen* (published only recently but written in the 1950s).⁶ More obviously political is Jorge Luis Borges's short story "La fiesta del monstruo" (published in 1955 but written at the beginning of the Perón regime). Borges, who had been removed by Perón from his post as director of the municipal library and appointed instead municipal poultry inspector, put forward the following interpretation of Peronism in an article published in a special issue of *Sur* whose title, "L'Illusion Comique," is revealing:

During the years of opprobrium and foolishness, the methods of commercial propaganda and of *littérature pour concierge* were applied to the government of the Republic. Thus, there were two histories: a criminal one comprised of jails, torture, prostitution, robbery, deaths, and arson; another of a scenic character, comprised of silliness and fables for consumption by the yokels. The dictatorship abominated (simulated to abominate) capitalism, but it copied its methods, like in Russia. . . . Most intriguing was the political stratagem that employed techniques of drama and melodrama. 7

Even more interesting is Borges's interpretation of October 17, 1945, in which the structure of feeling referred to above is evident: "On October 17, 1945, they pretended that a colonel had been arrested and kidnapped, and that the people of Buenos Aires rescued him; nobody took the trouble to explain who had kidnapped him nor were his whereabouts known. Neither was there legal punishment for the supposed kidnappers nor were their names revealed."8

In a similar vein, Guillermo De Torre said in the same issue of *Sur*: "All in Peronism is a colossal imposture. All was apocryphal, anachronistic." Peronism was seen as something beyond reality, as a pathology, and as an evil parenthesis in the history of the country.9

This "pathological" perception of Peronism is evident principally in the spate of books published on the topic within the first several years of Perón's fall. Most of these books were written either by people who had gone into exile during Perón's rule or who at a certain moment had participated or been close to the regime and felt that they had to explain their actions.10 A quick look at the titles of those books provides us with a feel for the spirit in which

they were written. For most of the authors, Peronism Was the local variant of fascism and nazism (or "Bonapartism," for the left-wing writers), in which the perverse figures of Perón and his dead wife were seen as omnipotent manipulators of the will of the working class.¹¹ By using categories of analysis such as fascism and nazism to characterize the Peronist phenomenon, these authors were implicitly acknowledging the difficulties they had in making sense of Peronism. They resorted to known European categories because they could not deal with Peronism in its original context. The Peronist regime was seen as an interminable series of incidents of corruption, torture, censorship, and the like. With Perón gone, the task was now to resocialize the working class and incorporate it into a more democratic political system. Probably the most notorious example of this vision was the *Libro negro de la segunda tiranía* (the "second tyranny"), published by the government of the

"Revolución Libertadora," the name adopted by the revolutionary movement that overthrew Perón. This book, whose very title was revealing-*segunda tiranía* reminds the reader of the first one, that of Juan Manuel de Rosas in the nineteenth century-contained the conclusions reached by the investigating committees established by the new government to study various aspects of the Perón regime. 12 It states, "The inexplicable, the monstrous, is that a dictatorship could be established in times of peace and prosperity (such was the case of Argentina when Perón came to power) without there existing immediate causes to justify it, nor true antecedents which made possible its prediction."13 In the "pathological interpretation" of Peronism, the ten years of Peronist rule had been, it was hoped, a temporary deviation in the country's historical development and one whose legacy had to be undone.14

However, for some more perceptive though not necessarily less anti-Peronist authors, it was obvious that things in Argentina had changed irrevocably. Moreover, some of them discovered late that there was "another Argentina," to whom Peronism, far from being an almost diabolical evil as some had tried to portray it, represented rather the only available channel to the achievement of personal dignity and an improvement in the country's economic and social conditions. In 1956 the novelist Ernesto Sabato wrote about the fall of Perón: "That night of September 1955, while the *doctores*, landowners, and writers noisily celebrated in the living room the fall of the tyrant, in a corner of the kitchen I saw that the Indian women who worked there had their eyes full of tears; and although during all those years I had meditated about the tragic dualism of the Argentine people, in that moment it appeared to me in its most moving way."15

Nonetheless, the "pathological" assessments of Peronism notwithstanding, it is also possible to discover within a few years after the fall of Perón the first attempts toward a comprehensive interpretation of what Peronism had been. Among those attempts, although from very different political perspectives and certainly with different goals in mind, were Jorge Abelardo Ramos's *Perón: Historia de su triunfo y su derrota*, a book that underwent several changes in title and structure in subsequent editions, and Gino Germani's *Política y sociedad en una época de transición*.¹⁶

At the center of Ramos's interpretation is a long quotation from Leon Trotsky about the impossibility of achieving democracy in colonial or semicolonial countries. In those countries, Ramos agreed, governments usually assume a Bonapartist or semi-

Bonapartist character that under certain circumstances may incorporate progressive and anti-imperialist characteristics-the case of Peronism.¹⁷ For Ramos, the history of Argentina is largely the history of the penetration of British, American, or Soviet imperialism. However, in spite of this rather simplistic vision of Argentine history, there are certain aspects of Ramos's interpretation that are worth noting. First, Ramos's emphasis on placing Peronism in a broader context refines the solely pathological interpretation, minimizing Perón's role as the great manipulator of the working classes. For Ramos, the events of October 17, 1945, were neither the result of Perón's machinations nor a mobilization of the lumpenproletariat, as the traditional left-wing parties purportedly believed.¹⁸ It was rather a spontaneous mass movement of workers that led to Perón's rise to power. Far from being manipulated by Perón, the workers created Perón. Peronism was a national movement, and its ideological limitations were due to the dependent situation of the country and to the masses' lack of political education: "Under the basic banners of Peronism . . . great masses of men and women, who only ten years ago lived in pre-capitalist backwardness, made their triumphant entry into Argentine politics. The road they took was the right one; there was no other better one available to defend their interests, and the ones that might have, were not sufficiently trustworthy to be followed."¹⁹

This vision of Peronism as a genuinely liberating movement became fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s. Juan José Hernández Arregui, for example, saw in Peronism a true incarnation of *socialismo nacional*.²⁰ Nevertheless, Ramos does not completely shed the pathological interpretation of Peronism. The very concept

of Bonapartism in Marxist terminology conjures up a somehow perverse political system.

Second, a much more sophisticated interpretation of Peronism, and one that eventually became the core of the so-called orthodox interpretation of Peronism, is offered by the Italo-Argentine sociologist Gino Germani. His *Política y sociedad* is a collection of essays on different theoretical and empirical topics of Latin American sociology written between the fall of Perón and the early 1960s. Germani's theoretical framework was the "theory of modernization" in fashion at the time. Although Germani does not hide his aversion for the fallen regime, his study is probably the first attempt at a "scientific," comprehensive explanation of the origins of Peronism. His main question is the following: Why did the masses pick a nondemocratic, totalitarian path for their incorporation into

politics rather than a democratic or more traditional left-wing one? The explanation he offers is found in the character and timing of the modernization process as well as in the central role of the "recent internal migrants." During the 1930s and early 1940s, as a result of the process of rapid industrialization that resulted from the Great Depression and the outbreak of World War II, a flood of rural migrants without previous political or union experience poured into Buenos Aires to work in the city's new industries:

[As a result of the internal migrations], great masses, quickly transplanted to the city and suddenly transformed from rural peons into industrial workers, acquired a political importance without finding at the same time the institutional channels needed for their integration into the democratic system. The repressive policies of the governments at the beginning of the century, the ambivalence and relative failure of the middle class governments . . . the severe limitations on democracy . . . together with the absence of political parties able to provide an adequate expression of their feelings and needs, left those masses "available," and made of them an element ready to be used by any adventurer who offered them some form of political participation. 21

According to Germani there was, therefore, a dualism in the Argentine working class on the eve of Perón's coming to power. On the one hand, there were the workers with strong leftist traditions, the "old workers" with political and trade union experience who were not co-opted by Perón, at least in the beginning. On the other hand, there were the "new workers," recent internal migrants who were easily attracted by Perón's demagogic discourse and policies.²² Germani does not avoid using fascism and nazism as his terms of comparison to Peronism. However, he acknowledges that the European totalitarian experiences were different from the one in

Argentina. Whereas in Europe, fascism and nazism drew their support basically from the middle class on the road to proletarianization, Peronism was massively supported by the working class. This peculiarity was the result of the late modernization of Argentina, Peronism's being a phenomenon resulting from the transition to modernity.²³

In spite of all the negative characteristics that Germani attributes to Peronism, he also recognized some positive features in it. He did not accept the idea that Perón manipulated the masses by simply granting them bread and butter concessions. Perón had the support of the masses because he gave them something else that was very important. Under Perón, the masses became self-conscious political actors, free from the traditional patterns of social behavior. Thus,

to what extent can the attitudes of the masses be characterized as "irrational"? Germani offers the following answer:

Strictly speaking, the institutional, moral, and economic heresies would not have been at all necessary, and even less so a totalitarian regime. . . . The appearance of the popular masses on the political stage, and their acceptance by Argentine society, could have been achieved through democratic education and the channels of expression that democracy can provide. From that point of view, there is no doubt that the path taken by the working class must be considered *irrational*. . . . But here it is necessary to ask ourselves: Was such a democratic process possible, given the conditions in the country after the 1930 coup? The answer is clearly no. 24

Refining considerably the "pathological" vision, Germani argued that Peronism was the natural outcome of a peculiar process of modernization. Peronism was less a pathology than the process that gave rise to it. Indeed, in another essay included in *Política y sociedad*, Germani offers a further qualification to the pathological interpretation of Peronism. In the chapter titled "From Traditional Society to Mass Participation in Latin America," written in 1961, Germani includes Peronism in the broader category of nationalpopular movements typical of the less developed countries, such as those in Latin America, thereby questioning its supposedly unique character²⁵

Germani's interpretation became canonical in the decade following the publication of his book. A subsequent and very influential analysis, which followed Germani's lead, also stressing the heteronomy of the popular masses who followed Perón, was offered by Torcuato Di Tella. For Di Tella, Latin American populism, of which Peronism was the most important example, is

the result of groups of peasants and urban workers eager to obtain their share of national income and political power while lacking the proper organizational framework in which to channel their class interests. The true novelty in Di Tella's analysis is, however, his emphasis on the need of what he calls an "anti-status quo elite" who felt a discrepancy between their expectations and their actual opportunities. The role of this elite in the formation of populist coalitions is to lead the social mobilization of the masses.

According to Di Tella, this particular sector of the elite comprised, in the case of Peronism, sectors of the army and industrialists.²⁶

Germani's and Di Tella's interpretations became the core of the so-called orthodox interpretation of Peronism during the decade of the 1960s. However, it was also during that decade that perceptions of Peronism's role in Argentina changed considerably. First,

the Peronist period of government was receding into history as time went by, losing direct relevance to the everyday political life of the country. Second, since the influence of Peronism as a "unifying myth" in the powerful organized working class proved to be an endurable phenomenon and was actually growing stronger, it became evident very quickly that any explanation of Peronism as a sort of social pathology in Argentine history would not be satisfactory.²⁷ Third, Perón had introduced, in spite of himself, deep structural changes in the country that could not be ignored. In this sense it is possible to talk, as Tulio Halperin does, of a "Peronist revolution."²⁸ In addition, it was becoming evident for left-wing politicians and intellectuals that in order to promote a rapprochement with the working class, from which they had been estranged since 1945, they had to accept Peronism as the dominant facet of the workers' ideology and experience. Moreover, Perón himself from his exile in Spain was again becoming an important force in Argentine politics. Although for certain sectors he remained the "fugitive tyrant," Perón was vindicating his place in Argentine history and the country's political life. It was obvious that a different interpretation of Peronism was necessary.²⁹

As a result, a wave of works appeared that looked back at Peronism in order to understand the country's contemporary crisis. Peronism was gradually losing its almost metaphysical character and was becoming more and more an object of study for sociologists, historians, and intellectuals.³⁰ Moreover, new voices began to be heard as former Peronist leaders started to produce their own versions of the Peronist period.³¹ One result of this change in Peronism's public image was the "history of Peronism" published by the magazine *Primera Plana* in the mid-1960s, which consisted

of a series of articles covering almost every aspect of the Peronist government. In most of the articles, former Peronist leaders related their experiences and told their versions of various facets of the period. Another product of the evolution in the perception of Peronism was the volume edited by Carlos Fayt, *La naturaleza del peronismo*, which contained the conclusions of a research project carried out by students and faculty of the "Cátedra de Derecho Político" of the University of Buenos Aires Law School.³² The objective of the study was to "provide material for the understanding of the what and why of Peronism in Argentine reality," and therefore "to initiate the objective understanding of that reality."³³ The book included primary sources and a complete discussion on the current interpretations of Peronism. For Fayt, Peronism was still

an enigma and to some extent a pathology; but the fact that the volume was the product of a seminar organized at the law school of a public university showed that the times were changing.

Probably one of the most important books on the topic published in the late 1960s was Felix Luna's *El 45: Crónica de un año decisivo*. Luna's *El 45*, a book which went through numerous editions and acquired a classic status, is an almost day-by-day account of the crucial year of 1945, considered by its author the watershed year in modern Argentine history. Written in a journalistic style, *El 45* radiates a sense of *mea culpa*. Luna belonged to a family of prominent members of the Unión Cívica Radical Party and, at the time of the events he relates, he was involved in the opposition student movement. Luna admits his own inability at the time to understand the way history was unfolding. 34

This book is important for two reasons. First, it was probably the first well-documented account of the process that brought Perón to power, reproducing many important documents that had not been previously published, including a letter sent by Perón to his fiancée, Eva Duarte, from his prison on Martín García Island in October 1945. Second, and in my view more significant, is that this book is a milestone because Luna restores the emergence of Peronism to the "contingencies of history," by showing that Perón's rise to power was not only the result of the interplay of social forces or of deep structural changes in Argentina's society and economy. One of the shortcomings of the book, in fact, is that Luna does not analyze those questions in depth at all. He preferred to concentrate on episodes and the actions of people like Amadeo Sabattini, the idiosyncratic, longtime Radical Party caudillo of the

province of Córdoba, whose indecisiveness at a crucial political moment allowed Perón's political fortunes to recover, or Dr. Juan Alvarez, the attorney general who was required by the military government to put together an interim cabinet upon Perón's resignation and failed to do so.³⁵

For Luna, the process that brought Perón to power was also the result of the inability of the opposition properly to evaluate the events that were taking place. Luna's book shows that in 1945, no one was in full control, not even Perón. Peronism is not presented in Luna's work as the inevitable outcome of a complex process of social change, but as one of a number of possible outcomes of a complicated and open-ended historical process. Luna's book is not a "scientific" analysis of the origins of Peronism; it is nothing more and nothing less than a compelling historical narrative. But this return to *histoire événementelle* is probably its most important

contribution because, by shifting the focus of analysis from society to politics, it restores Peronism, as the title of one of its chapters claims, to the "hurricane of history," minimizing its character as a pathology. 36

However, the real turning point in the interpretations of the origins of Peronism came in the early 1970s with the publication of Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero's *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*. This book consists basically of two essays. The first, "Crecimiento industrial y alianza de clases en la Argentina (1930-1940)," analyzes the response of different sectors of the upper classes to the process of industrial growth that took place in the 1930s. But it was the second, "El movimiento obrero en los orígenes del peronismo," that gave Germani's theory of the dualism of the working classes a blow from which it never recovered. This essay began a debate on the origins of Peronism that continued until very recently.³⁷

Murmis and Portantiero took the analysis back to the realm of society. For them, Peronism cannot be understood in terms of a total rupture with the past. Rather, in analyzing its origins, it is necessary to go back to the 1930s. Unlike Germani, who had seen in Peronism a distorted version of fascism shaped by the peculiar way in which the new working class was incorporated into the political system, for Murmis and Portantiero the explanation had to be found in some structural features of the development of Argentine society during the 1930s: "Our hypothesis leads us to believe that the presence of a previous lag period between economic development and participation was decisive for the

understanding of the specific features of some populist movements, in particular of Peronism."³⁸

The authors deny the importance of the dualism of the working classes as a crucial factor in explaining the emergence of Peronism while stressing the continuities between Perón's policies and the goals of the old union leaders.³⁹ In a situation characterized by enormous capital accumulation without equitable distribution, Perón, from his post in the Ministry of Labor and Welfare, was able to give the unions what they wanted. On the other hand, and as a consequence of this, Murmis and Portantiero reject the idea of the heteronomy of the working classes under Perón as stressed by the orthodox theory. As for Di Tella, for Murmis and Portantiero, Peronism was not supported only by the working class, as Germani had claimed. Instead, they see it as a polyclass alliance composed of workers, sectors of the army, and small industrialists who emerged

as a consequence of import-substitutive industrialization during the 1930s.⁴⁰ Such an alliance became possible solely as a result of the way in which the Argentine economy and society had developed in that decade.

Murmis and Portantiero's book had two important results. First, it successfully challenged the image of Perón as an almost omnipotent manipulator of a passive working class. Second, since Peronism was not seen as a complete rupture with the past, and since the explanation of its origins had to be sought in the characteristics of the working class and unions during the previous period, Murmis and Portantiero provided a new incentive for the study of those "preconditions of Peronism." Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, several important books and dissertations were written by both Argentines and foreign scholars on different aspects of the development of the Argentine working class and related topics during the period between 1930 and 1943. The central theme of most of these works was the origins of Peronism.⁴¹ By questioning some of the basic presumptions of the "orthodox" interpretations of the early support for Perón, Murmis and Portantiero initiated an important debate on the origins of Peronism, particularly regarding its social base. A major part of this debate was presented in Manuel Mora y Araujo and Ignacio Llorente, eds., *El voto peronista: Ensayos de sociología electoral argentina*, which includes most of the relevant articles previously published on the topic as well as other essays on the characteristics of the Peronist electorate, specifically in the provinces and in more recent elections.⁴²

In spite of the refinement in interpretations, Peronism was still in

many ways an enigma. The principal interest for scholars remained the initial social base of Peronism or, in more general terms, "Why did Peronism happen?" Even general studies of Peronism, such as Peter Waldmann's *El peronismo (1943-1955)*, were concerned with this problem. Waldmann explains Peronism as the outcome of the crises of modernization, following the model formulated by Almond and Pye. Indeed, the concern of most scholars until recently has been to explain how Peronism was possible, rather than to analyze what the Perón era had actually been, thereby reflecting somehow the endurance of the vision of Peronism as a kind of pathology. Indeed, the pathological interpretation is by no means dead, and it seems to have reemerged in some recent scholarship, such as Carlos Waisman's *Reversal of Development in Argentina*.⁴³ Waisman, a former student of Germani's at Harvard, sees the emergence of Peronism as the result of fears experienced by sectors of the

elite about the potentially revolutionary outcome of postwar conditions. For Waisman, Perón's policy of total protection of industry and the class alliances and corporatist system that resulted from such a policy were the major causes of Argentina's change of track in development from that of a "new settlement region" (like Australia, Canada, or the United States) to that of an "undeveloped country" like the rest of Latin America. 44

However, it may be asked whether the study of the class basis of the groups that provided early support for Perón is the best approach for understanding the Peronist phenomenon. For the Argentine sociologist Ernesto Laclau, the answer to that question is clearly no.⁴⁵ In his seminal essay, a general study of populism from a Marxist perspective that takes Peronism as its main example, Laclau moves the discussion to a new dimension: ideology. He disagrees that a class-based analysis of a movement is the key to understanding it. This is particularly true in the case of populism, as many movements with very different class bases can be defined as populist. According to Laclau, we have to turn to the ideological/discursive level in order to find the key component of populism. Following Althusser, Laclau points out that "*what constitutes the unifying principle of an ideological discourse is the 'subject' interpellated and thus constituted through this discourse.*"⁴⁶ According to Laclau, the interpellation that defines populism is the popular democratic one: interpellation to the "people." But this is only the beginning of the problem, as there are other ideological discourses that also make reference to "the people" and that are certainly not populist. What finally defines populism is the way in which the popular-democratic interpellation is articulated in the discourse. "*Our thesis,*" says Laclau, "*is that*

*populism consists of the presentation of the popular-democratic interpellation as a synthetic antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology."*⁴⁷

For Laclau, who uses a Gramscian framework, the prerequisite for the emergence of populism is a crisis of the dominant ideological discourse. This crisis emerges from a more general social crisis that can be the result of either a fracture in the hegemonic bloc of power, in which a fraction of it needs to appeal to "the people" in order to assert its hegemony, or of a crisis in the ability of the system "to neutralize the dominated sectors."⁴⁸ According to Laclau, this precondition existed in Argentina in the early 1940s. The result of the crisis of the 1930s and the social and economic changes it unleashed was the decline of the traditional oligarchic hegemony, which was reflected in a crisis of the dominant political discourse.

This discourse had been based on the fusion of liberalism with democracy. On the other hand, a new discursive possibility emerged: democratic authoritarianism. Laclau stated that "this sundering meant, among other things, that the power bloc's ability to neutralize its contradictions with the people had diminished: in the reflection of liberal ideological forms, now broken and murky, new and unforeseen combinations were possible." 49 This is why, according to Laclau, "the whole thrust of Peronist ideology at this stage was bent towards the aim of cutting liberalism's last links with a democratic connotative domain and presenting it as a straightforward cover for oligarchic class interests."50 Despite Laclau's conceptual sophistication, there are some problems with his analysis. One wonders, for instance, to what extent Perón really broke with the liberal tradition. More work is probably necessary to clarify this question.⁵¹ But by moving the discussion on the nature of Peronism from the realm of class analysis to discourse, Laclau opened a new and still mostly unexplored area of inquiry. Some of his generalizations certainly merit further discussion.⁵²

The interest in explaining the origins of Peronism stimulated the publication of many books and articles but was not matched by a comparable scholarship on other aspects of the Peronist regime. While some aspects of the Peronist era have received considerable attention from scholars, others have been virtually ignored. Two topics that have attracted the interest of scholars have been the military and, of course, the unions. Examples of studies dealing with the military are the well-researched books of Robert Potash and the more general but penetrating study of French scholar Alain Rouquie, both focusing on the military and politics during a broader span but with extremely useful sections on the Peronist

period.⁵³ The crucial relationship between the Peronist state and the unions was the central topic of the pioneering work by Samuel Baily, as well as the more recent, and also more specific, studies by Louise Doyon and Joel Horowitz among the foreign scholars and the previously cited studies by Juan Carlos Torre and Hugo del Campo among the Argentines.⁵⁴ Torre, in particular, demonstrated definitively that the "old" working class as much as the "new" supported Perón at the beginning.⁵⁵

In addition, there are two other topics that attracted considerable attention from those studying Peronism: the figures of Perón and Evita themselves. From the official biography of Perón written by Enrique Pavón Pereyra in 1953 to the massive biography by Joseph Page, a number of biographies and accounts of Perón's life

have been written, most of them, however, for partisan purposes.⁵⁶ However, Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La novela de Perón*, a work of fiction, provides the most compelling interpretation of Perón's life and his role in recent Argentine history. The novel is based on long conversations that Eloy Martínez had with Perón during the latter's exile in Madrid, as well as on the copious documentation that the author gathered during almost ten years of research. Although Perón's first two terms of government are not covered by the novel, its cogent account of his life and era provides excellent clues for the understanding of Peronism.

Even more than Perón himself, Eva Perón has also been the subject of many books and articles and several works of fiction, including a rock opera written by British composers Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber in the late 1970s (recently adapted into a film starring Madonna) and a new novel by Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita*.⁵⁷ Eva's short but dramatic life, as well as her powerful role in the Peronist regime, caught the attention of journalists, historians, and sociologists. Moreover, Eva became one of the most important symbols of Peronist imagery (particularly after her death), susceptible to different interpretations and reformulations. Thus, it is extremely difficult to separate myth from reality when considering her. The disappearance of her embalmed corpse after Perón's fall from power—it was eventually returned to Perón by the military government in the early 1970s—only added to her mythologization. Gabriela Sontag, in her 1983 annotated bibliography of Eva Perón, surveys more than one hundred books, including unpublished dissertations, and more than two hundred articles dealing with Eva.⁵⁸

Most of these works, however, were written for partisan purposes and do not add much to our knowledge of her. Probably the first serious attempt to clear up some of the mysteries and debunk the myths surrounding Eva's life is *La vida de Eva Perón* by Otelio Borroni and Roberto Vacca.⁵⁹ This book is based on interviews and contains some interesting information. Also very useful, and more tightly argued, are the books and articles by Marysa Navarro, probably the best-documented studies on Evita.⁶⁰ However, while Borroni and Vacca, as well as Navarro, try to present a historically accurate life of Evita, Julie Taylor's aim is precisely to analyze the myths surrounding Evita. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Taylor argues, although at times her evidence is not completely convincing, that most of the semireligious mythology surrounding Eva Perón was fabricated by sectors of the middle class, rather than

being the spontaneous manifestations of the working class who became, in Taylor's analysis, mere consumers of that mythology. 61 In some ways, Taylor once again emphasizes the heteronomy of the working class vis-à-vis the Peronist regime.

The absence over past decades of important studies on many concrete aspects of the Peronist state can be attributed to diverse factors, the first of which is the problem of sources. After the fall of Perón, the archives of several ministries and other public agencies from the period were destroyed or simply vanished, making research on certain areas almost impossible. One major source for reconstructing the Peronist past was only recently acquired by the national archive, the papers of the second five-year plan from the Secretaría de Asuntos Técnicos. Some important documents, such as certain records of the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), were recovered later, but others never resurfaced.⁶² Other published sources such as newspapers (*La Epoca*, *Democracia*, *Mundo Peronista*), are not always easily available to the researcher. The important Colección Peronista at the Biblioteca del Congreso was only recently opened to the public, and access to it is still sometimes difficult. Moreover, several government publications and much statistical information that had been regularly published by various ministries simply ceased to appear during the Peronist period.⁶³

A second obstacle to research, perhaps even more important, has been the shared image of what Peronism was. Both the Peronist government and the anti-Peronist governments that followed—although for very different reasons—tried to portray the Peronist era as a homogeneous bloc. Reading both Peronist and anti-Peronist

writings, it is very difficult to find evidence of tension within the regime. Except for the most obvious conflicts, such as the one with the church at the end of Perón's government, Perón was seen, either with consent or by repression, as having controlled every aspect of Argentine life.⁶⁴ Government sources were lavish in their praise of Perón and Eva. From *Mundo Peronista* to the *Monitor de Educación Común*, the tone is always celebratory. Only lately has this monolithic image started to be challenged. More recent studies have demonstrated that the Peronist era, and Peronism itself, was far less idyllic than Perón cared to admit. As Louise Doyon and others have shown in several articles, and more in extenso in Doyon's doctoral dissertation, not even the unions were under Perón's complete control. Walter Little made an assessment of the unions' attitude toward the Peronist state, which, according to him,

ran from loyalty to opposition, while Baily and Doyon provided specific examples opposing Perón. In fact, as Peter Ross has pointed out, the unions imposed strong constraints upon some of Perón's social policies. 65

Moreover, the emphasis given to the relationship between Perón and the unions sometimes led to an oversimplified vision of the society Perón had to deal with. Undoubtedly, the organized working class (in large part organized by Perón) was Perón's main source of support, and this support was channeled through the powerful Peronist union system. However, as Ignacio Llorente and others suggest, Perón also attracted the votes of other sectors of the working class and, generally speaking, of the poor-people who were hardly incorporated into the Peronist union system and therefore were out of reach of the unions' welfare system. These sectors were also numerically important. As Germani shows, out of 1,800,000 workers registered by the 1947 national census as being occupied in industrial activities, there were 500,000 who had not been registered as such by the 1946 industrial census. Probably, as Germani points out, "most of the difference can be explained by the presence of people who, even working within the industrial sector, do not work in organized firms but exercise their activity in an artisanal way, either individually or in the family."⁶⁶ There is evidence that at least some of these people were not incorporated into the union system at all, as is suggested by the high percentage of workingclass people who did not participate in union retirement plans, the *cajas de jubilación*.⁶⁷ It would seem that we are again in the presence of an approach to Peronism that stresses the existence of a dual working class. But the importance of that duality would reside not in the division between "old" and "new" workers, as the

orthodox theory claimed, but rather in the division between workers who were incorporated into the Peronist trade union apparatus and workers who were not. Certainly the role of the powerful, although still not very well studied, Fundación Eva Perón was crucial in dealing with the latter.⁶⁸

Recent studies present an image of the Perón era that is different from the one we are accustomed to in that the Perón regime is now seen more in terms of a continuity with the past. The changes that Perón made in society and politics were apparently less significant than was previously thought. Some scholars even claim that his innovations in the trade union movement followed the established path of the development of unions with the state.⁶⁹ Moreover, they note that Perón had to face strong constraints from the

very working class that led him to power. By stressing the continuities of Peronism with the past, recent research has contributed to contextualize the period, taking away definitively from Perón the role of the "great history maker." However, although this interpretation is certainly a necessary and healthy reaction to the more traditional explanations, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the period from 1943 to 1955 was in some fundamental ways a watershed in modern Argentine history. Certainly no other political leader in Argentine history, with the possible exception of the nineteenth-century dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas, aroused so much love or hatred. But Perón's most important legacy, besides the strong labor movement, was probably a new political culture. Perceptions about the role of the state, the relationship between the state and society, the role of political institutions and parties, the concept of citizenship, and the ways different social groups were seen in society were reformulated during Perón's years. In short, Peronism changed, at least in part, what Geertz has called the "context of intelligibility" of the political game.⁷⁰

The scholarly emphasis on the issues surrounding the origins of Peronism, and on the structure of the social classes that supported it, left aside one element crucial for its understanding. The impact and resilience of Peronism cannot be explained solely in terms of improvements in the living conditions of the working class. Perón gave the workers a new identity based on a symbolic exchange between himself and the masses. Using Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, Perón endowed the masses with symbolic capital, reformulating in some way the social system of classification.⁷¹ Although there were some works during the 1970s that tried to

address the question of Peronist identity, using survey techniques, only recently has this facet of Peronism begun to be analyzed by scholars.⁷² For example, works on the Partido Peronista Femenino by Susana Bianchi and Norma Sanchis in Argentina and the extremely provocative book by the British scholar Daniel James show the fruitfulness, as well as the problems, of this kind of approach.⁷³ Moreover, newer works deal directly with the mechanisms and characteristics of this symbolic exchange between the Peronist regime and the masses: rituals, education, and mass media, among other topics. Efforts in this direction are to be found in the works of Alberto Ciria, Aníbal Viguera, and this author, as well as from the point of view of religion, in Lila Caimari's previously cited book on the relationship between church and state in Peronist Argentina.⁷⁴

As of this writing, Argentina is for the third time under a Peronist government. This time, however, things are very different. President Carlos Menem is undoing many of the legacies of Perón of which Peronists were most proud. Facing serious economic problems, the Argentine government is privatizing the economy, cutting public expenditures, and selling off most of the public services that Perón nationalized a half a century ago. President Menem's policies are in many respects the opposite of what one would expect from a Peronist government. His first electoral campaign, however, was mostly organized in a traditional Peronist vernacular. To what point his still great although declining popularity among certain sectors of the working class is based (at least partially) on the endurance of a Peronist mystique-perhaps in some ways more powerful than the political reality-is a matter of conjecture. What is clear is that this Peronist mystique has been one of the most powerful components of Argentine political life for nearly the last halfcentury. The history of its causes and transformation is an important facet of the Peronist phenomenon that remains to be researched.

Peronism remains part of, to use Tulio Halperin's words, "Argentina's unmastered past." In recent years, our understanding of Peronism has been enriched by a number of excellent scholarly studies, but there is much to be done and many unexplored areas remain. As Juan Carlos Torre pointed out in his closing remarks to the 1990 Harvard conference on Peronism, part of the problem is that we lack monographic studies on fundamental questions, such as on the role of industrialists in the Peronist alliance. On that particular question, an important advance has been made with James Brennan's chapter in this volume. But many questions

remain and call for future research. In addition to filling in the gaps, new approaches are also needed, approaches, it is hoped, that this and other chapters will suggest. Again in Halperin Donghi's words, the "long agony of Peronist Argentina" is coming to an end. The time is ripe to come to terms with Peronism as a historical phenomenon.

Notes

1. Tulio Halperin Donghi, *La larga agonía de la argentina peronista* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1994).
2. Lila M. Caimari, *Perón y la iglesia católica: Religión, estado y sociedad en la Argentina, 1943-1955* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1995), p. 17.
3. A recent partial review of some of the relevant interpretations of Peronism is Emilio de Ipola, "Ruptura y continuidad: Claves parciales para un balance de

las interpretaciones del peronismo," *Desarrollo Económico* 29, no. 115 (October-December 1989). See also the comments in Jorge Raúl Jorrat, "Reflexiones sobre un balance de las interpretaciones del peronismo," *ibid.* 30, no. 118 (July-September 1990). See also Chapter 1 in this volume.

4. I am also leaving aside an analysis of Peronism's third government (1973-1976), which has its own set of complex problems beyond the scope of this essay.

5. Raymond Williams defines a "structure of feeling" as a "social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis . . . has its emergent, connecting and dominant characteristics, indeed its special hierarchies." See Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). For a provocative analysis of the relationship between literature and Peronism see Andrés Avallaneda, *El habla de la ideología: Modos de réplica literaria en la Argentina contemporánea* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1983). For earlier approaches to the topic through literature see the useful, although openly partisan, book by Ernesto Goldar, *El peronismo en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Freeland, 1971). The same can be said about the collected works of Norman Briski et al., *La cultura popular del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Cimarrón, 1973). On the topic of literature, see also Martin Stabb, "Argentine Letters and the Peronato," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* 13 (1971) and Pedro Orgambide, "Peronismo y antiperonismo en la literatura argentina," *Cambio* (October-March

1979). For early post-Peronist interpretations of Peronism see also *Contorno*, nos. 7 and 8 (July 1956).

6. Julio Cortázar's collection of short stories, such as *Bestiario*, could also be interpreted in this light—at least some of the stories, such as "Las puertas del cielo" or "Casa tomada."

7. *Sur* 237 (November-December 1955). Author's translation.

8. October 17, 1945, was a founding day for Peronism. Perón (then secretary of labor and welfare, minister of war, and vice president) had been removed from power and imprisoned by the government because of pressure from the opposition on October 8. On October 17 a great number of workers from the industrial suburbs of Buenos Aires marched to the Plaza de Mayo and "rescued" their leader. Since then, October 17 has been the most important Peronist holiday and one of the most significant components of Peronist imagery. Included among the books and articles written specifically about the 17th of October by the protagonists, journalists, or scholars are Hugo Gambini, *El 17 de octubre de 1945* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1969), a narrative account of the events; and Cipriano Reyes, *Yo hice el 17 de octubre* (Buenos Aires: G. S. Edit, 1973). Also Angel Perelman, *Como hicimos el 17 de octubre* (Buenos Aires: Coyoacán, 1961), provides the perspectives of two union leaders. A provocative interpretation of the nature of October 17 and of the motivation of those who participated is provided by Daniel James, "October 17th and 18th, 1945: Mass Protest, Peronism, and the Argentine Working Class," *Journal of Social History*, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 441-62. See also Mariano Plotkin, "Rituales políticos, imágenes y carisma: La celebración del 17 de octubre y el imaginario peronista," *Anuario IEHS* 8 (1993).

9. The newspaper *Noticias Gráficas*, in its edition of January 25,

1956, referred to Peronism as a "toxic virus." Interestingly, the perception of Peronism and Perón as something somehow "beyond reality" seems to have endured. Tomás Eloy Martínez, on the dust jacket of his insightful novel *La novela de Perón*, 4th ed. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1987), says that "this is a novel in which

everything is true, . . . [but] I decided that the truths contained in this book did not allow anything other than the language of the imagination."

10. For examples see Ricardo Boizard, *Esa noche de Perón* (Buenos Aires: De Du, 1955); Raúl Damonte Taborda, *Ayer fue San Perón: 12 años de humillación argentina* (Buenos Aires: Gure, 1955); Silvano Santander, *Técnica de una traición: Juan Perón y Eva Perón, agentes del nazismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Antigua, 1955); Juan Antonio Solari, *Doce años de oprobio* (Buenos Aires: Bases Editorial, 1956); Armando Alonso Piñeiro, *La dictadura peronista* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Prestigio, 1955); and Bernardo Rabinovitz, *Sucedió en la Argentina, 1943-1955: Lo que no se dijo* (Buenos Aires: Gure, 1956). Some of these books went through several editions in a space of months, showing the great demand that existed for these kinds of writings. For a review of these and other early works on Peronism see Fritz Hoffmann, "Perón and After: A Review Article," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 36, no. 4 (November 1956): p. 1; and *ibid.* 39, no. 2 (May 1959): p. 2.

11. Even José Luis Romero, in *Las ideas políticas en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956), includes the Peronist period, in a chapter entitled "La línea del fascismo." And Juan José Sebreli has tried to resuscitate the bonapartist image of Peronism, claiming that it had elements of both bonapartism and fascism in his *Los deseos imaginarios del Peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1983).

12. The book was a summary of the five-volume *Documentación, autores y cómplices de las irregularidades cometidas durante la*

segunda tiranía, published by the "Comisión Nacional de Investigaciones" of the vice presidency of the republic in 1958.

13. *Libro negro de la segunda tiranía*, p. 34.

14. The "pathological interpretation" of Peronism resembles the evolution of the historiography on nazism produced in Germany during the first decades after the war.

15. Ernesto Sabato, *El otro rostro del peronismo: Carta abierta a Mario Amadeo* (Buenos Aires: Gure, 1956). Author's translation.

16. Jorge Abelardo Ramos, *Perón: Historia de su triunfo y su derrota* (Buenos Aires: Amerindia, 1959); Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición: De la sociedad tradicional a la sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1962). Ramos's study is a short book, little more than a pamphlet, which was actually a chapter of the longer *Revolución y contrarevolución en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1957). *Revolución y contrarevolución* went through successive editions, each incorporating new material. In the third edition (1965), it was already a two-volume work, and the 1970 edition came out in five volumes. What is interesting about this is that in the 1970 edition, the volume that covers the period from 1943 through 1973 was entitled "La era del bonapartismo." In the last edition (1981) it was retitled "La era del peronismo," suggesting Ramos's change of mind over time.

17. Ramos, *Perón: Historia de su triunfo y su derrota*, pp. 27-28.

18. The interpretation of the traditional left can be seen clearly in the editions of the Socialist newspaper *La Vanguardia* and the Communist *La Hora* following October 17, 1945.

19. Ramos, *Perón: Historia de su triunfo y su derrota*, p. 55.

Author's translation.

20. See J. J. Hernández Arregui, *Peronismo y socialismo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Peronismo, Socialismo, 1972). See also idem, *La formación de la conciencia nacional*, 1st ed. (Buenos Aires: Hachea, 1960).

21. Germani, *Política y sociedad*, p. 231.

22. The idea that links Peronism to a "new working class" is also shared, although from a different perspective, by those authors who saw in Peronism a genuinely national revolutionary movement. For those authors, the new workers, true representatives of the nation and free from the experience of alienation suffered by the old working class, were more capable of carrying out a real revolutionary movement. The old working class, in turn, was limited by its ties to reformist parties and ideologies. For a review of these interpretations see Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1984), p. 63. For other examples of this interpretation see Alberto Belloni, *Peronismo y socialismo nacional* (Buenos Aires: Coyoacán, 1962), p. 13; and *Del anarquismo al peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Peña Lillo, 1960), p. 59. Another approach also employing the dualist model, but from another perspective, is Samuel Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics in Argentina* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967). Following Gino Germani's dualist model, Baily sees in Peronism the triumph of the creole nationalism of the new sectors of the working class as opposed to the "liberal" nationalism of the traditional sectors of the working class linked to the Socialist Party. This interpretation, which sees in Peronism the vestiges of certain traditional features of Argentine culture, is, in part, shared by Robert Crassweller in *Perón and the Enigmas of Argentina* (New York: Norton, 1987).

23. This interpretation of fascism and nazism as only lower middle-class movements has been challenged. See, for instance, Richard

Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); or Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Revolution of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). However, back in the 1930s, Theodore Abel had already suggested that nazism had a broader social base. See Theodore Abel, *Why Hitler Came to Power* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1938).

24. Germani, *Política y sociedad*, p. 251 (emphasis in the original).

25. It is worth noting that the essay dealing specifically with Peronism, from which the quotations were taken, was written in 1956, just one year after the fall of Perón; the essay on Latin America was written in 1961. This might explain Germani's changed perspective.

26. Torcuato Di Tella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," in *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, ed. Claudio Véliz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). See also idem, *Sociología de los procesos políticos* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor de América Latina, 1985); and idem, *Latin American Politics: A Theoretical Framework* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989). The role of industrialists has been questioned by Eldon Kenworthy, "Did the New Industrialists Play a Significant Role in the Formation of Perón's Coalition, 1943-1946?" in *New Perspectives in Modern Argentina*, ed. Alberto Ciria (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1972); and by Joel Horowitz, "Industrialists and the Rise of Perón: Some Implications for the Conceptualization of Populism," *Americas* 47, no. 2 (October 1990): 199-217.

27. Although there were divisions within the Peronist trade union movement, sometimes leading to violent outcomes, all of the rival groups declared themselves representatives of "true Peronism." See Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the*

Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

28. Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Argentina en el callejón*, 2d ed. (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1995). Halperin Donghi's book is an extremely cogent analysis of the

crisis that Argentina was experiencing at the time the book was written, attempting to understand the historical context of that crisis. Although it is not a book about Peronism, Peronism nonetheless occupies a central place in the analysis.

29. It would be extremely interesting to study to what degree the historiography of the period contributed to Perón's resuscitation in the 1960s. During that decade, historical revisionism (exalting the figure of Rosas and the caudillos, for example) became a sort of alternative official history and certainly became the official history of Peronism. Many of the revisionist historians of the period were also staunch Peronists. Perón's image was easily associated with that of Rosas. To my knowledge, there is still no serious study on this subject.

30. A product of this interest in Peronism, which was also mixed in many cases with political motivations, was the many interviews published with Perón during the 1960s. See, for example, Esteban Peicovich, *Hola Perón* (Buenos Aires: J. Alvarez, 1965). This literature, however, is beyond the scope of this essay.

31. See, among others, Perelman, *Como hicimos el 17 de octubre*; Reyes, *Yo hice el 17 de octubre*; Luis Mansalvo, *Testigo de la primera hora del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Pleamer, 1974); and Antonio Cafiero, *Cinco años después* (Buenos Aires: El Gráfico, 1961). See also Jorge Antonio, *Y ahora qué?* (Buenos Aires: Verum el Militia, 1966).

32. Carlos Fayt, ed., *La naturaleza del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Viracocha, 1967). Another "objective" approach to Peronism published in the 1960s was Pierre Lux Wurm, *Le Peronisme* (Paris:

Libraire de Droit et de Jurisprudence Pichon et Durand Auzias, 1965).

33. Fayt, *La naturaleza del peronismo*, p. 13 (author's emphasis).

34. Felix Luna, *El 45: Crónica de un año decisivo* (Buenos Aires: Jorge Alvarez, 1969).

35. Ibid., p. 116.

36. Luna later wrote several other studies of Peronism. The last is his threevolume *Perón y su tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1984), which has gone through several editions since its publication. Although less interesting than *El 45*, this study offers good insights on certain themes not considered elsewhere, such as the development of Peronism in the interior of the country.

37. For an example of part of this debate see Manuel Mora y Araujo and Ignacio Llorente, *El voto peronista: Ensayos de sociología electoral argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1980). On the role of the old union leaders in the formation of Peronism see Juan Carlos Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón: Sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1990). See also idem, "Interpretando (una vez más) los orígenes del peronismo," *Desarrollo Económico* 28, no. 112 (January-March 1989): 525-48. See also Walter Little's pioneering "Political Integration in Peronist Argentina" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1971); and Eldon Kenworthy, "The Function of the Little Known Case in Theory Formation or What Peronism Wasn't," *Comparative Politics* 6 (1973).

38. Murmis and Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*, p. 71.

39. Ibid., p. 73.

40. Some of the ideas discussed by Murmis and Portantiero, as well as some of the data presented by them, would be challenged by other authors in later works. For the participation of industrialists in the Peronist alliance see the dissenting views of Kenworthy and Horowitz previously cited. See also Judith Teichman, "Interest Conflict and Entrepreneurial Support for Perón," *Latin American Research Review* 16, no. 1 (1981): 144-55. Teichman's conclusions support

Murmis and Portantiero's hypothesis. For the support of the working classes before Perón's coming to power see Ricardo Gaudio and Jorge Pilone, "El desarrollo de la negociación colectiva durante la etapa de modernización industrial en la Argentina," in *La formación del sindicalismo peronista*, ed. Juan Carlos Torre (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1988). Nevertheless, the basic argument regarding the participation of the "old" working class in the origins of Peronism is supported by empirical evidence and is now undisputed. In addition to Torre's previously cited works see Hugo del Campo, *Sindicalismo y peronismo: Los comienzos de un vínculo perdurable* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 1983).

41. Among others see David Tamarin, *The Argentine Labor Movement, 1930-1945: A Study in the Origins of Peronism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); Hiroshi Matsushita, *El movimiento obrero argentino, 1930-1945: Sus proyecciones en los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1983); Joel Horowitz, *Argentine Unions, the State and the Rise of Perón, 1930-1945* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1990); and Mark Falcoff and Ronald Dolkart, eds., *Prologue to Perón: Argentina in Depression and War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). Both Horowitz's and Tamarin's books are based on doctoral dissertations written in the 1970s. See also the works of Torre and Del Campo previously cited.

42. Among the articles in that volume dealing with the debate on the social origins of Peronism, particularly noteworthy are Gino Germani, "El surgimiento del peronismo: El rol de los obreros y los migrantes internos"; Peter Smith, "La base social del peronismo";

and Tulio Halperin Donghi, "Algunas observaciones sobre Germani, el surgimiento del peronismo y los migrantes internos."

43. Carlos H. Waisman, *Reversal of Development in Argentina. Postwar Counterrevolutionary Policies and Their Structural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

44. This interpretation of Peronism as the beginning and cause of Argentine decline is, of course, not new. See, for example, the classic study by Carlos Díaz Alejandro, *Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

45. Ernesto Laclau, "Towards a Theory of Populism," in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism-Fascism-Populism*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London: NLB, Humanities Press, 1977).

46. Ibid., p. 101 (emphasis in original).

47. Ibid., p. 172 (emphasis in original).

48. Ibid., p. 175.

49. Ibid., p. 188.

50. Ibid., p. 189.

51. Recent studies have tended to show that liberalism was an important component in Peronist ideology. See, for example, Colin Wilson, "Between Rosas and Sarmiento: Notes on Nationalism in Peronist Thought," *The Americas* 39, no. 3 (1983). Tomás Eloy Martínez, in his excellently informed and insightful novel *La novela de Perón*, shows that Perón believed himself to be heir to traditional Argentinian liberalism. This point was stressed by Tulio Halperin Donghi in "Argentina's Unmastered Past," *Latin American Research Review* 23, no. 2 (1988); and in idem, "El lugar

del peronismo en la tradición política argentina," in *Perón, del exilio al poder*, ed. Samuel Amaral and Mariano Plotkin (Buenos Aires: Cántaro, 1993). For another perspective on the components of Peronist ideology see Cristián Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo: Argentina en la crisis ideológica mundial, 1927-1955* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1987).

52. Laclau's ideas were criticized by, among others, Emilio de Ipola, *Ideología y discurso populista* (Buenos Aires: Folios Ediciones, 1983), in particular Chapter 3, "Populismo e ideología I (a propósito de Ernesto Laclau, *Política e ideología en la teoría marxista*)."

53. Robert L. Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969, 1980); Alain Rouquie, *Pouvoir militaire et société politique en la République argentine* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation National des Sciences Politiques, 1978).

54. Louise Doyon, "El crecimiento sindical bajo el peronismo," *Desarrollo Económico*, no. 57 (April-June 1975); idem, "Conflictos obreros durante el régimen peronista," *ibid.*, no. 67 (October-December 1977); idem, "La organización del movimiento sindical peronista, 1946-1955," *ibid.*, 24, no. 94 (July-September 1984). See also, Walter Little, "La organización obrera y el estado peronista, 1943-55," *ibid.*, no. 75 (October-December 1979). Unfortunately, Doyon's impressive "Organized Labour and Perón, 1943-1955: A Study of the Conflictual Dynamics of the Peronist Movement in Power" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1978) remains unpublished. Horowitz's work deals mostly with the pre-Peronist era and the origins of Peronism. See, for example, his "Impact of Pre-1943 Labor Union Traditions on Peronism," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15 (1983). Also his 1990 book *Argentine Unions, the State and the Rise of Perón*, partially based on his doctoral dissertation, in which he changes his earlier interpretation, emphasizing now the rupture that Peronism represented for the labor movement's traditions.

55. See, in particular, Juan Carlos Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón: Sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1990).

56. Enrique Pavón Pereyra, *Perón: Preparación de una vida para el mando* (Buenos Aires: Espiño, 1953); Joseph Page, *Perón: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1983). See also Robert Alexander, *Juan Domingo Perón: A History* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979); Fermín Chávez, *Perón y el peronismo en la historia contemporánea*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: Oriente, 1975); and Crassweller's previously cited biography.

57. Tomás Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1995).

58. Gabriela Sontag, *Eva Perón: Books, Articles and Other Sources of Study: An Annotated Bibliography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1983).

59. Otelo Borroni and Roberto Vacca, *La vida de Eva Perón*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1971). Volume 2 was never published.

60. Marysa Navarro and Nicholas Fraser, *Eva Perón* (New York: Norton, 1980). Also, Marysa Navarro, *Evita* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1981); and "Evita and the Crisis of 17 October 1945: A Case Study of Peronist and anti-Peronist Mythology," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 12 (1980).

61. Julie Taylor, *Eva Perón: The Myths of a Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

62. The recovery of the CGT records of October 16, for example, allowed Juan Carlos Torre to write his now classic article "La CGT y el 17 de octubre de 1945," *Todo es Historia* 105 (1976), showing the relevant role of the CGT in the October 17 events.

63. This absence is clear in the field of education, for example. The yearly reports of the Ministry of Education had been published regularly until 1947. The same happened with other important government publications.

64. On the relations between church and state during the Perón regime see, among others, Hugo Gambini, *El peronismo y la Iglesia* (Buenos Aires: Centro

Editor de América Latina, 1971); and, although more useful for the pre-Perón era, Noreen Stack, "Avoiding the Greater Evil: The Response of the Catholic Church to Juan Perón, 1943-1955" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1976). A major breakthrough on the topic is Lila Caimari's previously cited study, *Perón y la iglesia católica*. On the specific topic of Catholic education see Virginia Leonard, *Politicians, Pupils and Priests: Argentine Education since 1943* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 1989).

65. Peter Ross, "Policy Formation and Implementation of Social Welfare in Peronist Argentina, 1943-1955" (Ph.D. diss., University of New South Wales, Australia, 1988).

66. Gino Germani, *Estructura social de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Raigal, 1955), p. 169.

67. This argument is suggested in an unpublished paper by Sergio Lischinsky, "La afiliación al sistema previsional, 1944-1955: Logros y dificultades en su expansión," Buenos Aires, 1989. Moreover, Doyon shows that the rate of affiliation to the unions, even during the apogee of Peronism, was far from universal.

68. Serious work on the Fundación Eva Perón is still badly needed. Marysa Navarro, in her biography of Evita, as well as many others, addressed the topic, but there remains much to be said. However, this is not an easy task, as almost all the records of the Fundación seem to have disappeared. There are some "indirect" ways to approach the topic (there are some records available in private archives and also, for instance, in the press and reports of the Ministry of Public Works), which deserve to be explored.

69. For this line of argument see the previously cited hooks of

Matsushita, and Gaudio and Piloni. For a contrasting argument see Horowitz's previously cited study.

70. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ed. Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 14.

71. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 479.

72. An example of the survey approach is Jeanne Kirkpatrick, *Leader and Vanguard in Mass Society: A Study of Peronism in Argentina* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971). Bourdieu discusses the problems and limitations of this kind of political analysis.

73. Susana Bianchi and Norma Sanchis, *El partido peronista femenino* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1988). This book is an interesting oral history of the women's wing of the Peronist Party. It also provides insights into the Fundación Eva Perón but is especially useful in revealing the "mentalities" of the women who participated in the party. See James, *Resistance and Integration*.

74. Alberto Ciria, *Política y cultura popular: La Argentina peronista, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1983); Mariano Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1994). One approach is through the study of literature. See Ernesto Goldar, *El peronismo en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Freeland, 1971). Goldar approached the topic from a partisan point of view. The same can also be said about the collective works of Norman Briski et al., *La cultura popular del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Cimarrón, 1973). On the topic of literature see also Martin Stabb, "Argentine Letters and the Peronato," *Journal of Inter-*

American Studies and World Affairs 13 (1971); and Pedro
Orgambide, "Peronismo y antiperonismo en la literatura argentina,"
Cambio

(Mexico), (October 1978-March 1979). Andrés Avallaneda's previously cited and useful book on some facets of the topic, *El habla de la ideología*, should encourage more research.

II

PERONISM AND ARGENTINE SOCIETY

3

From Rebellion to Rupture: Peronist Party Politics in Neuquén, 1961-1973

María Fernanda Arias

Since the 1940s, Argentina has had basically a two-party political system, with the Radical Party (Unión Cívica Radical) and the Peronist Party (Partido Justicialista) dividing the electorate between them and leaving only a small share for the lesser national parties. Nevertheless, there also have existed important parties at the provincial level, virtually unassailable in their own bailiwicks, that have established alliances with the dominant parties in national elections. The most important of these parties have been the Unión Cívica Radical Bloquista in San Juan province, the Pacto Autonomista-Liberal in the province of Corrientes, and the Movimiento Popular Neuquino (MPN) in Neuquén. Among these parties, the MPN is especially interesting, particularly because of its close relationship with the country's dominant political force, Peronism. It is one of the few examples of a majority provincial party that, with the exception of the 1983 and 1985 congressional elections, never lost an election in its district. At the same time, it was the only neo-Peronist party to stand up to Juan Perón and his emissaries during the leader's exile between 1955 and 1972. It is also a party that has remained a political force to this day. A study of the social and ideological origins of the leadership and evolution of the MPN from its founding in 1961 and its reinsertion in democratic party politics in 1973 constitutes a contribution to a

little-known chapter in the history of Peronism as well as to the history of Argentine provincial parties, many of which had close links to Peronism. 1

The period from 1961 to 1973 is crucial in the history of the MPN. It is a sufficiently long and important period that one can venture some ideas about the extent to which the MPN was imbued with conservative values and with caudillismo, as well as about the attachment to federalist principles that are traditionally attributed to Argentine provincial parties. Moreover, by studying the history of the MPN it is possible to analyze how Peronism reinvented itself and was recast following Perón's fall from power in 1955, the implications of which reached as far as a distant southern province in the Patagonia. Although the MPN never renounced its Peronist identity, during this period the party did develop three successive political strategies that led to its breaking away from mainstream Peronism as well as to its maintaining complete independence from other national parties. The first strategy was that of rebellion: Its very establishment defied the orders of Perón and the official Peronist organizations, which appeared reluctant to participate in elections as long as Peronism was proscribed. The second strategy was that of accommodation and participation in the so-called bureaucratic-authoritarian project initiated by the military regime of the Argentine Revolution in 1966. The final strategy was definitive rupture with official Peronism as revealed in the open struggle between local representatives of the Peronist movement and the MPN, culminating in the triumph by the MPN in the 1973 provincial elections.

What were the neo-Peronist parties and when did they emerge? Although in another work these questions have been analyzed in detail,² it is necessary to make a few remarks here in order to put the Movimiento Popular Neuquino in a broader historical perspective. Neo-Peronism appeared subsequent to the overthrow

of Perón in 1955 as a movement of local Peronist political bosses. Many were provincial political caudillos and others came from the federal capital, although those from the capital were the first to make peace with Perón. The first neo-Peronist party was the Unión Popular Party, created by Perón's former minister of the interior, Juan Atilio Bramuglia, shortly following the overthrow of Perón. According to one of its founders, the Unión Popular was established in order to create a kind of "awning" under which Peronists could take shelter as long as the party was proscribed.³ Nevertheless, Perón and his closest followers considered it an act of open rebellion on the part of Bramuglia. Perón's strategy in this first period of exile was to oppose the government actively and to have Peronists cast blank votes in the elections in order to express their unwillingness

to recognize the legitimacy of a political system that refused to allow them to participate. Yet what most irritated Perón was not the Unión Popular's participation in the political system but the fact that it had emerged without his approval in an unmistakable desire to free Peronism from the reins of its exiled leader.

Both the Unión Popular and the other neo-Peronist parties that emerged in these years did poorly in the 1958 general elections. In those elections, Perón had ordered his followers to vote for the ticket of the Unión Cívica Radical Intransigente (UCRI), headed by Arturo Frondizi, in exchange for the lifting of the proscription against the Peronist Party. But in the wake of Frondizi's failure to keep his promise, Perón again urged the casting of blank votes in the 1960 congressional elections. In those elections, his orders were not obeyed as in the past. This led to an internal struggle between those who held that Peronism should participate in the elections with its own party, the so-called soft-liners (*línea blanda*), and those who wanted to continue with the policies of insurrection and industrial sabotage, the hard-liners (*línea dura*). The hard-liners were finally eclipsed in 1962 when Perón accepted the proposal that Peronism participate in the congressional and gubernatorial elections in the form of the neo-Peronist parties, the Unión Popular among them.

It was in this context of advances and retreats in the search for new tactics to benefit Peronism that Elías Sapag founded the MPN in July 1961 to try to direct the votes of Neuquén's Peronists. Although at its public unveiling the MPN openly claimed its identification with Peronism, in the party's statutes there was no mention of the Peronist movement.⁴ By this omission, the MPN

was surely attempting to avoid a conflict with the government, which at that moment was categorically refusing to re-legalize Peronism. The MPN always considered itself a political organization with Peronist roots. Even so, from its origin it had maintained two distinguishing characteristics: The first was that it never allied itself with the mainstream Peronist movement, which was then taking orders from and subordinate to the Peronist Executive and Coordinating Council. The second original trait was the party's charismatic leadership, one dominated by a single Neuquén family, the Sapags.

The Sapags were quintessential Argentine political caudillos. The phenomenon of caudillismo in the Argentine interior is related to the distinct social and political environment characteristic of the country's provinces. With the exception of the federal capital and its surroundings, as well as the other highly urbanized parts of the provinces of Mendoza, Santa Fé, Entre Ríos, and Córdoba,

Argentina is a rural country. As is well known, rural society in Latin America has historically encouraged paternalistic social relations in which the landowner acquires the obedience of his dependents, not simply in exchange for economic benefits but also because of cultural influences. This characteristic is extended to politics as well, creating a political culture of clientilism in which local political caudillos acquire the support of their followers thanks to a direct and personal relationship with them-as well as to the real rewards that they are able to offer in the form of jobs in the provincial and municipal bureaucracies. Despite having a progressive social and economic content to its policies, the MPN does not escape this general characterization of the parties of the interior.

Who were the Sapags? They were an immigrant family that settled in Zapala, a small city in the province of Neuquén, in the first decade of this century. The family was represented in politics by three brothers whose political careers spanned several decades: Elías, Felipe, and Amado. Elías, born in Lebanon in 1911, was the eldest son and head of the family. After having been mayor of Cutral-Có (Neuquén province) between 1934 and 1938, he established the local branch of the Partido Laborista, subsequently called the Partido de la Revolución and finally the Partido Peronista. Felipe, born in Neuquén in 1917, was mayor of the provincial capital of the same name between 1952 and 1955. Finally, Amado also served as mayor of Neuquén. How important were the Sapags within provincial society? Like many enterprising immigrant families who settled in that distant and inhospitable province, this family belonged to the commercial bourgeoisie of the region. They began their business in retail trade, but soon

broadened their activities to include agricultural and cattle enterprises, mining, and construction. Through these activities, they ultimately made their fortune; as prosperous businessmen they belonged to what could fairly be called the upper class in Neuquén, albeit it was a different kind of upper class than that found in more traditional provinces such as those in the northwest, where lineage and ancestry counted for more than wealth. Indeed, whereas the upper classes in those provinces were composed of the very old families and espoused traditional and conservative values, those drawn from frontier provinces such as Neuquén tended to be of humble origins and to hold political opinions and social attitudes that tended to be a bit more progressive. 5

It is this latter characteristic that distinguished the MPN from the rest of the provincial Peronist parties. Historically, the Peronism of provinces such as Córdoba and the province of Buenos Aires

had emerged thanks to the efforts of caudillos of the Conservative Party working to create a political alternative that could defeat their longtime rival and principal political adversary, the Unión Cívica Radical. On the eve of the historic general election of February 1946, they saw in a new party led by Perón a possible ally that could hold in check the growth of the Radical Party among the lower classes. It was for this purpose that they allied with Peronism, thereby garnering an important political vehicle in the redefined political landscape of the country. From the origins of the party, the principal leaders of the MPN came from sectors that had supported Perón in the 1940s. Moreover, the MPN shared many of the traditional values of these conservative parties. Nevertheless, as we will soon see, the party's essential political pragmatism did not bind it to doctrinaire positions but, rather, to a great extent subordinated its conservatism to a larger political project profoundly rooted in the particular characteristics of local Neuquén society.

The MPN was formally established following the decision to allow the neo-Peronist parties to participate in the 1962 gubernatorial and congressional elections, and it selected candidates to run for provincial and national office with great success. It was due precisely to the success of this and other neo-Peronist parties in various provinces that Frondizi annulled the election results. However, for a number of reasons, the launching of the MPN turned out to be extremely promising for a party of such recent formation. As Vicente Palermo correctly notes, the lack of any kind of rooted party tradition in the province favored such a development. Neuquén had been made a province only in 1954. Although there had been municipal elections for many years, and

in 1951 the province had participated in the presidential elections, the party competition common in other parts of the country was still lacking. Neuquén therefore did not have strong ties to the great established parties. 6 With regard to official Peronism, it was too weak to challenge the MPN successfully when the latter was finally created. An interesting fact illustrating this fragility is that the Peronist leader who was the local representative of Perón's Consejo Coordinador del Justicialismo, Alfredo de Martín, ended up joining the MPN shortly after it was established.⁷

The MPN's success in establishing an independent Peronist party had much to do, in addition to Neuquén's status as a province distant from the country's centers of political power and therefore lacking a strong party tradition, with the idiosyncrasies of a party that combined a traditional Peronist ideology with a charismatic

leadership, support from business, and a modernizing vision of the role of the province in the national economy. In that respect one must note the abilities of the Sapags as caudillos, their ability to put together a political alliance, quintessentially Peronist, composed of business groups and the lower classes in pursuit of a project of regional development. It is also necessary to emphasize their skill in incorporating a new wave of migrants, one different from the unskilled Chilean migrant farm workers who traditionally came to the province. These new migrants were largely professionals from other parts of the country, including the federal capital, who were attracted by the economic progress of the province and found a home in a young, innovative local party.

The electoral victories of Peronism in 1962 contributed to the overthrow of Frondizi by the military later that same year. Shortly upon assuming office as provisional president, José María Guido called general elections for July 7, 1963. Peronism prepared itself to participate in the presidential elections, creating an electoral alliance, the Frente Electoral, composed of various parties and led by the Unión Popular. Under pressure from the military, the government almost immediately proscribed the presidential ticket of the Frente and allowed the participation of Peronist candidates in the election only for some minor offices. Perón then ordered that the Frente withdraw all its candidates and that the Peronist electorate once again cast blank votes. Nevertheless, to Perón's surprise and that of the consejo coordinador, various *frentista* parties as well as other Peronist organizations did not withdraw their candidates. By this action, they won a number of congressional seats and provincial governments.

In the 1962 elections, the MPN, one of the neo-Peronist parties that did not join the Frente, won a landslide victory in Neuquén's congressional and gubernatorial elections. Equally significant, the local representative of the Frente, the Unión Popular, ran candidates only for the congressional elections and polled a paltry 6.4 percent of the total votes. Encouraged by the results, senator-elect Elías Sapag declared his support for the independence of his party and its right to dissent from any positions adopted by official Peronism through the Consejo Coordinador. He affirmed that the MPN "was in a state of rebellion within Peronism," that its followers were not "a flock of sheep," and that it would not allow itself to be guided "by remote control." A bit more diplomatically, governor-elect Felipe Sapag declared that the MPN was working "on behalf of the historic demands of Perón and Peronism" but was

also aware that these demands would have to adapt themselves "to the reality of each province." 8

This open independence of mind on the part of Neuquén leaders was revealed in their political tactics in the Argentine congress. A breakaway faction of the Radical Party, the Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo (UCRP), had won a plurality but not a majority of the votes in the 1963 election and therefore lacked the electoral votes to bring its ticket to power. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Elías Sapag, the neo-Peronists supported this ticket in the electoral college, something that began a cordial relationship between the MPN and the government of the UCRP presidential candidate, Arturo Illia, who served from 1963 to 1966.⁹ Moreover, together with other neo-Peronists in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, they formed a separate congressional bloc, the Movimientos Populares Provinciales, provincial Peronist movements that considered themselves loyal to Peronist ideology but demanded freedom of action in their own provincial bailiwicks.¹⁰ At the same time, in addition to allying with the other neo-Peronists for the reasons just mentioned, the MPN began a stage in its governing of the province that would be characterized by a number of notable achievements that greatly strengthened its prestige at both the provincial and national levels.

For various reasons, the year 1964 was a disappointing one for the neo-Peronist parties. Thanks to the successful reincorporation of many neo-Peronist leaders into the mainstream Peronist movement and its organizations, the very people who had defied Perón a year before returned to the fold, weakening neo-Peronism. Perón, who had hoped to recover his hold over the Peronist masses and the

local leaders of the Peronist movement, announced an impending trip to Argentina and the end of his exile. With this strategy, he tried not only to maintain the Peronist mystique among the Argentine people but also to catch the attention of those Peronist leaders who had not displayed absolute fealty. Ultimately, Perón was unable to return to Argentina. Nevertheless, the tactic was an overall success. In the first place, in mid-1964 the Peronist bloc of deputies split between the *ortodoxos*, headed by Juan Luco, and the neo-Peronists, led by Ferdinando Pedrini, both congressmen from Chaco. The same thing happened in the Senate, where only the senators from Neuquén, Elías Sapag and Francisco Capraro, defended their independence from the official organs of the Peronist Party. Secondly, Perón was able to reorganize his movement, creating new organizations that responded to his directives.¹¹

Still, for the time being the neo-Peronists did not lose the hope of creating a political organization independent of the *ortodoxo* tendency. As a result of excellent relations with the Radical government, especially with the president of the Senate, Carlos Perette, they had obtained economic support for the provinces under their control. They had also managed to participate in the drafting of a new Statute of the Political Parties (Estatuto de Partidos Políticos) that hindered the participation of mainstream Peronism in national politics while favoring that of the neo-Peronists. Undoubtedly, the governing party preferred a trustworthy Peronism fully committed to the integrity of the party system, such as that of the neo-Peronists, to a destabilizing one directed from Madrid by a resentful exiled leader. 12

The blocs of the Movimientos Populares Provinciales were the driving force behind two conventions that met in December 1964 and January 1965 in San Nicolás and Córdoba, respectively, for purposes of creating a national neo-Peronist party to run in the March 1965 congressional elections. Although the politicians of the MPN participated actively in that effort, very few parties attended, and the attempt ended in failure. The reasons for the failure were Perón's threatened December 1964 visit as well as the activities of the trade union leader Augusto Vandor, who had indicated his interest in forming a new labor-based Peronist party for the 1965 elections. Although Perón's return to Argentina was prevented, it proved that the leader still had the will to return, belying what the neo-Peronists whispered regarding the caudillo's poor state of health, that it would keep him removed from politics. Moreover, despite the features of the Estatuto de Partidos Políticos

just mentioned, it held out the prospect that Perón could organize a Peronist party and count on the support of many neo-Peronists.

Ultimately the Justicia Electoral, the national electoral commission, denied legal status to the Peronist Party. As a result, the bulk of the Peronist movement participated in the 1965 election under the banner of the Unión Popular and other neo-Peronist parties. This happened because many of these parties ended up forming part of mainstream Peronism in the elections. The MPN, by contrast, was one of the few that did not. This drew the criticisms of *Retorno*, one of the principal organs of the *ortodoxos*, which accused the Sapags of betraying Peronism and of conspiring with the governing party.¹³ In the March 1965 congressional elections, the *ortodoxo* Peronism represented by the Unión Popular and its allies defeated the governing party. It also comfortably defeated

the neo-Peronists who had run separately, obtaining only 6.3 percent of the vote. From that moment on, there was established a bloc of Peronist congressmen under the leadership of Paulino Niembro, one of Vandor's principal lieutenants. Nevertheless, the MPN easily won in the provincial elections and its power remained unchanged in Neuquén.

In June 1966 a military coup led by General Juan Carlos Onganía overthrew the government of Arturo Illia, putting an end to almost three years of civilian rule and ushering in a new stage in Argentine politics. Three characteristics of the political trajectory of the Movimiento Popular Neuquino need to be emphasized. Throughout these years, the MPN upheld a firm policy of rebellion toward Perón and the mainstream Peronist movement. The MPN's administration in Neuquén was effective, and the party had served as a staunch defender of provincial interests. On the other side of the ledger, it had failed to organize the other neo-Peronist parties into an organization of national stature under the federalist banner of defense of provincial rights, or to confront the *ortodoxos* successfully. Nevertheless, by combining a popular caudillismo that had converted the local neo-Peronists into the natural political leaders of Neuquén, the notoriety and accomplishments of the MPN government between 1963 and 1966 attracted the attention of the successive governments of the "Argentine Revolution," as the recently established military regime had begun to be called.

What was the attitude of the neo-Peronists and the Sapags with regard to the overthrow of Illia? Given the fact that the coup had emerged from the nationalist sector of the military, many Peronist trade union leaders and not a few neo-Peronist politicians looked

favorably upon Onganía. But their enthusiasm soon disappeared when his government adopted hardline policies that affected their interests and implemented a conservative economic program in 1967 that imposed severe hardships on the country's wage earners. The 1966 coup had an ambivalent effect on the Sapags' power. Although Felipe lost his position as governor, all the MPN mayors remained in office. Moreover, since Illia's government had not been a particularly effective one, at first the Sapags were jubilant at the installation of Onganía's government. ¹⁴ Yet the political dilemma that soon faced the MPN encouraged doubts, at least on the part of Felipe Sapag.

The leaders of the MPN continued to resist integrating their party into the mainstream Peronist movement, now being led by Perón's personal delegate in the country, Jorge Daniel Paladino,

yet they also refused initially to cooperate with Onganía. Among the reasons for their intransigence was Felipe Sapag's criticism of Onganía's government for not having produced the structural changes he had promised. At the same time, Sapag and the MPN lambasted the exploration contracts signed by the government with foreign oil companies, claiming that they were disadvantageous to the country. Finally, Sapag maintained the hope of creating a political movement composed of the parties of the interior in defense of federalist principles. It was with that in mind that Sapag had initiated a dialogue with Ismael Amit, a member of former president Frondizi's *desarrollista* party and governor of the province of La Pampa, to create an alliance of parties that would oversee the development of the Patagonia. Nevertheless, this alliance could not be realized because *desarrollismo* was working closely with Onganía's government and the MPN was in the opposition. 15

In the interim there had occurred a number of serious disputes with Rodolfo Rosauer, the new governor of Neuquén who had been designated by the military government. Rosauer had openly clashed with Felipe Sapag, accusing him of corruption during his last administration, an accusation that won him the enmity of the MPN. His relations with the other political parties were also not good, and even business groups were displeased with his opposition to plans for building a hydroelectric plant in Chocón-Cerros Colorados. The plant was regarded by locals as a turning point in the province's economic development, from which it was hoped that many other economic benefits would be derived.¹⁶ But what really precipitated Rosauer's fall was the conflict between the construction firms and construction workers' union that were

building the Chocón-Cerros Colorados dam. In this conflict, a faction of the local Catholic church, and in particular the bishop of Neuquén, Jaime de Nevares, supported the workers' demands. In reprisal, the governor sent the municipal and state police to suppress the strike. Many workers and priests ended up in jail, and the local church condemned the outcome.¹⁷

The conflicts about the Chocón and de Nevares's protest coincided with the necessity for Onganía's government to win legitimacy and gain popular support following the wave of social protests in the country that had culminated in the so-called Cordobazo in May 1969. As a result, Onganía decided to implement a plan put forth by his advisers in which the government would recover the political initiative in the most unruly regions by putting into office

the locally popular political figures. Who then better for the job of governor of Neuquén than Felipe Sapag, a neo-Peronist who could offer the government a successful former administration, popularity, and the general support that had eluded Rosauer? For those reasons, in February 1971, Onganía offered Sapag the governorship, which he immediately accepted. 18

Felipe Sapag's acceptance of the governorship was partly the result of personal reasons that are very difficult to decipher. According to a collaborator and friend to whom he turned for advice, Sapag reasoned that, even though Onganía's government would not last, an effective administration by Sapag would greatly benefit his future political career.¹⁹ Moreover, his ideological positions did not greatly differ from those of the military government. He had never endorsed a hardline Peronism. His defense of provincial rights, administrative efficiency, and programs stressing economic development considerably resembled the nationalist and *desarrollista* proposals of the self-proclaimed "Argentine Revolution." Indeed, during the first year of his government, Sapag gave priority to the so-called techno-bureaucratic concerns of the Movimiento Popular Neuquino.²⁰ He took a great interest in economic policy and administrative restructuring and through those concerns sought to maintain a consensus among the Neuquén population and win support for the program of structural change proposed by Onganía. Such a policy would also give a nonpartisan look to a party, the MPN, with unmistakable Peronist roots. Even more, although his collaboration with the military government involved a certain political cost, ultimately this policy of economic modernization and bureaucratic efficiency with a minimalist

political profile helped the Sapags to remain firmly in power until the time they successfully confronted the 1973 general elections.

With the coming to power in June 1970 of a military man with nationalist leanings, General Robert Levingston, the hopes of Peronists were rekindled about the realization of the much-welcomed "revolutionary" changes that had been promised in 1966. With regard to his political program, Levingston sought popular legitimacy via a more open dialogue with the country's most influential institutions and the political parties. With that in mind, he planned the establishment of a "national movement" that would bring together those trade unionists, politicians, businessmen and military officers prepared to contribute to the success of the "revolution." With regard to Peronism, since Levingston believed that

Perón was finished politically, he moved closer to the positions espoused by the neo-Peronists and designated one of the latter's former leaders, Juan Luco, as his secretary of labor. 21

Levingston also continued Onganía's strategy of selecting provincial governors from the established political parties and gradually removing the military officers from those positions. Overriding the veto of the officers of the liberal camp who had traditionally been opposed to Peronism, he endorsed Felipe Sapag to continue as governor of Neuquén. At the urging of his secretary of labor, he also named two important provincial neo-Peronist leaders, both of whom also happened to be outspoken nationalists- Oscar Sarrulle and Ruperto Godoy-as governors of Tucumán and San Juan, respectively. Finally, he adopted an economic program that gave priority to the problems of regional development in distinct parts of the country.

There is no doubt that the Sapags shared a genuine concern with Levingston for the economic development of the most ignored parts of Argentina. Nevertheless, although there were negotiations to win Felipe's support for the political project promoted by Luco, the Sapags never played an important role in it.²² It is possible that they saw that Levingston's fall was close at hand. Neither can the idea be dismissed that they wished to maintain their political independence and therefore refused to ally with Luco, an individual who belonged to a sector of neo-Peronism without a large popular following, political clout, or much interest in their concern about the future of the regional economies. After some false alarms on the part of the military hierarchy, in March 1971, Levingston was replaced in the presidency by army commander General Alejandro

Lanusse. Convinced of the necessity of calling elections, the new president announced the gradual return to political normalcy in the country. His intention was to have a military man head the first of the democratic governments in order to facilitate the transition to parliamentary government. And who better than Lanusse himself to play that role? For that reason, he put all his efforts into looking for a political formula that would bring together different parties in support of his candidacy. He also attempted to strike a secret deal with Perón in which the latter would renounce his own candidacy in return for certain concessions that would favor the Peronist movement.

The relationship of the MPN to Lanusse's candidacy was never open or explicit. Nevertheless, thanks to the friendship of the Sapags with Lanusse, the MPN played a fundamental role in that endeavor.

A newspaper founded by the Sapags in 1979, *Sur Argentino*, began to disseminate Lanusse's image in the province. One of the editorials in the newspaper defended Lanusse's economic program, likening his confrontations with certain powerful entrenched interests to those of Perón with the Sociedad Rural and the Unión Industrial Argentina in the 1940s. At the same time, the newspaper declared that Lanusse's friendly contacts with the leftist military leaders in power in Peru since their 1968 revolution, and also with the government of Salvador Allende in Chile, were inspired by the same revolutionary principles espoused by those governments and that, as with Perón in 1946, Lanusse would not hesitate to confront the imperialist powers.²³

Together with other provincial parties such as the Movimiento Popular Jujeño, the Movimiento Popular Salteño, an independent faction of the Unión Cívica Radical Intransigente in Córdoba, and Socialismo Cristiano in Tucumán, the MPN contemplated creating a national party that would defend federalist principles.²⁴ To accomplish that, a candidate of national stature was needed, and Lanusse fit the bill. Nevertheless, the desertion of the MPN itself as well as other neo-Peronist parties torpedoed the project. In December 1972, Elías Sapag proclaimed Juan Domingo Perón to be the sole candidate of his party; other neo-Peronist leaders, such as Alberto Serú García of the Movimiento Popular Mendocino and Ricardo Durán of the Movimiento Popular Salteño, soon echoed his sentiments.²⁵

Elías Sapag's declaration ended with the launching of a thoroughly Peronist ticket with the support of the MPN. Nevertheless, the contacts with Lanusse were not broken off altogether. Proof of that

was Elías's trip to Madrid in April 1972, in which he apparently served as Lanusse's emissary to offer Perón a considerable sum of money in return for a number of political concessions that would greatly favor Lanusse's prospects. Perón revealed these conversations and Lanusse's offer to a foreign newspaper and rejected outright the possibility of any agreement on those terms. According to Elías, this was the result of a campaign waged against him by Héctor Cámpora, Perón's new personal emissary, for Sapag's having suggested that selecting Cámpora as the Peronist presidential candidate would be a political blunder. At any rate, the explanations offered by Sapag about these events were not altogether convincing. As a result of Perón's indiscretions, Sapag's prestige was badly damaged and there began a bitter struggle among the Sapags for control of the official Peronist Party in Neuquén. That

struggle would last until the March 1973 general elections, which restored civilian government to Argentina after almost seven years of military rule. 26

In summary, throughout this period of military rule, the Movimiento Popular Neuquino displayed an attitude more pragmatic than doctrinaire or ideological. Indeed, despite being a political party with a solid electoral base, in order to defend the rights and needs of the province more effectively it worked out a *modus vivendi* with the program of the "Revolución Argentina." That commitment and Felipe Sapag's apparent mediating mission between Perón and Lanusse did not end up hurting the MPN in the impending electoral contest. Quite the contrary, the MPN's effective performance in the government in the preceding years had politically benefited the party, and the Sapags were able to fend off the attacks by the Peronist Party to put an end to the MPN's venerable tradition of political independence.

The Frente Justicialista de Liberación (FREJULI) was established on Perón's orders to participate in the March 1973 general elections. The FREJULI was a broad alliance headed by the Peronist Party with pronounced *verticalista* sentiments-that is, of absolute obedience to Perón's orders-but also one characterized by radicalized positions that were quite removed from the ideological tradition of the original Peronism and that therefore looked with disfavor on the independently minded and conservative Peronism of the caudillos of the interior. Consequently, the electoral campaign faithfully reflected the profound rift that still existed between the leadership of the national Peronist organizations and that of the provincial Peronist movements, such as that of the

Sapags. This confrontation took place in many provinces-Santiago del Estero, for example, where Carlos Juárez defeated the FREJULI candidate and was elected governor. I will analyze only the case of Neuquén and the MPN.

The confrontation between the MPN and the national Peronist leadership had both ideological and tactical underpinnings. On the one hand, the MPN was opposed to the radicalization taking place within Peronism. On the other hand, for sheerly practical reasons the party was not prepared to subordinate itself to the undisputed leadership of Perón. Such was the importance of renegade sectors of Peronism like the MPN that the FREJULI presidential ticket, Héctor J. Cámpora and Vicente Solano Lima, campaigned personally in that and other provinces. With the help of their local officials in the province, the national leadership of the FREJULI

undertook a campaign against the Sapags. Cámpora, the presidential candidate, called the Sapags "rebels" and asserted that the MPN did not belong to the Peronist movement.²⁷ In response to these statements, upon choosing the campaign slogan, "Sapag with Perón," the MPN gave the impression that they were not in disagreement with Peronism but only with the national leadership of the Peronist Party. The Sapags made it appear that Perón had nothing to do with the actions of the party leadership, and they were in this way able to avoid any confrontation with Perón himself. Nevertheless, as a result of these tactical and ideological disagreements, the MPN did not endorse the presidential ticket and left its members and supporters free to choose whom to vote for. The MPN campaigned only for local candidates and for those running for the national congress.²⁸

The positions and actions of the MPN were reflected in the results of the March 1973 elections in Neuquén.²⁹ In the election for president and vice president, more than 30 percent of the votes cast were blank. A review of these results suggests that, although many of the MPN's members and sympathizers would ordinarily have voted for Peronism's national ticket, their votes expressed a widespread repudiation of the offensive by the Peronist leadership against their party; they submitted blank votes to express their displeasure, and also to avoid increasing the vote totals of the rival parties. The electoral contest for the selection of national and provincial legislators was also a clear show of support for the MPN. On the other hand, the party did not win the majority required to elect its candidate, and a second ballot was called for April. That election was extremely important because in the previous electoral campaign the ideological and tactical differences

between the MPN and the FREJULI had widened and a victory by the Sapags was necessary for their political survival.

Led by Juan Manuel Abal Medina, the secretary general of the Peronist Party, the national authorities of the FREJULI made every effort to frustrate the Sapags' hopes. This was inevitable, given that the Peronist Party was then in the hands of radicalized sectors devoted to the idea of creating a "socialist fatherland." Moreover, these groups demanded absolute loyalty to Perón, in contrast to the traditional independence of the MPN. In addition, the Sapags were caudillos drawn from the more traditional and paternalistic Peronism of the provinces, one closer to Peronism's founding principles and ideology, a conservative Peronism that moreover had cooperated intermittently with the military governments in power between 1966

and 1973. Finally, to their traditional base of power the Sapags had added an alliance with two important provincial trade union groups that had also refused to recognize the legitimacy of the FREJULI's and the Peronist trade union bureaucracy's *verticalista* positions: the local "62 Organizaciones" and the Unión Obrera de la Construcción (UOCRA), the construction workers' union and the most powerful trade union in booming Neuquén. Given the fact that the leaders of both these union organizations were locked in bitter disputes with their national union headquarters, they were natural and determined allies for the Sapags. 30

During a campaign tour through Neuquén in early April, Abal Medina accused Felipe Sapag of being a traitor to the Peronist cause and of representing "the worst of the Patagonian oligarchy."³¹ The accusation of betrayal was correct in one way but wrong in another, more profound way. The sociological characterization of their being part of the oligarchy was accurate, as in terms of both ideology and socioeconomic position the Sapags were clearly part of the provincial oligarchy. Still, the Montonero revolutionary Peronist Abal Medina forgot two important details. Although at that moment the revolutionary tendencies within Peronism were in control, a great deal of the original Peronism of the 1940s had emerged from and been sustained by the ranks of the conservative provincial oligarchies. In the second place, although the Sapags were a traditional dynasty, they enjoyed the general support of the population. To their charismatic leadership they had added the prestige of having converted Neuquén into an economically prosperous region. In the provinces, being an "oligarch" and a populist Peronist was not

necessarily as great a contradiction as a leftist Peronist might have thought.

The president-elect, C mpora, also criticized the Sapags for similar reasons. Stating that because of their economic weakness and the country's markedly centrist political tradition the provincial governments necessarily had to maintain good relations with national authorities, C mpora warned the Sapags that the central government would not attend to their interests simply because they called themselves Peronists and brandished the threat of a possible intervention of the province by Buenos Aires.³² Shortly before the second ballot, Per n called on the Peronist voters to support the FREJULI candidates so as to undermine the "personal ambitions of cliques and individuals."³³

The Sapags once again ignored the orders from Peronism's national leadership, as well as Per n's own instructions.³⁴ Moreover,

despite FREJULI's vigorous campaign and the pressures to undermine the Sapags' new trade union support coming from Perón and the national trade union leaderships of the "62 Organizaciones" and the UOCRA, the MPN won a decisive victory in the final gubernatorial election. Something similar occurred in Santiago del Estero, where there was also a second round. This caused the press to emphasize the counterproductive effects of Abal Medina's actions and of the interference by other national Peronist leaders in the Neuquén and Santiago del Estero elections. 35

In this way Felipe Sapag was converted into a leader par excellence of the cause of provincial federalism. In addition, he acquired notoriety and national standing in his struggle against a party bureaucracy with which many other members of the FREJULI alliance, the *desarrollistas*, for example, led by Frondizi and Rogelio Frigerio, were in disagreement. In short, the split between the MPN and mainstream Peronism was the outcome of the MPN's previous political trajectory, as well as the ideological disagreements and the heavy-handed actions of the national Peronist leadership in their dealings with the Sapags. The results ended up benefiting the MPN. The rift strengthened its political hegemony in the province and gave national standing to a party that had been supported by the public since the early 1960s precisely because of its political independence as well as its administrative efficiency.

The political career of the Movimiento Popular Neuquino thus passed through essentially three stages: the initial rebellion against Peronist *verticalismo*, accommodation with military rule, and the final split with the Peronist Party. During all three stages, the MPN

displayed a manifest independence with regard to all parties and national political organizations. It showed a passion for defending local rights, and finally demonstrated ambiguous behavior with regard to the formation of a national political alliance composed of provincial parties that might more effectively resist centrist policies coming from Buenos Aires. With respect to the first characteristic, the MPN always kept itself at arm's length from the anointed bureaucrats of the Peronist movement who tried to impose decisions not to the liking of the majority of Neuquén's citizenry. At the same time, although the party maintained fluid contacts with the military governments in power between 1966 and 1973, it cannot be said that it simply submitted to those governments. Both the MPN and the military itself saw the party's ties to the governments of the period as being merely a strategic decision that was mutually advantageous. The military was ensured the necessary social peace

in the province after the Cordobazo and the Sapags were given a free hand to implement their own program of government and maintain their political importance.

That the Movimiento Popular Neuquino was also solidly rooted in local concerns was demonstrated by the MPN's continuous preaching of federalism, as well as its concrete accomplishments in terms of economic development. Through these actions it won the unqualified support of various social classes. Moreover, although a study of the policies and programs followed by the Sapags is beyond the scope of this study, their importance was recognized by much of the mass media in that period.³⁶ Less favorably, the MPN never committed itself to the creation of a national party with a federalist program. That decision caused two projects, of which the Sapags had been among the initial supporters, to shipwreck. The first was the attempt by neo-Peronist caudillos to convert their provincial parties into an organization of national transcendence that could free them from the leadership of Perón. The second was Lanusse's frustrated presidential candidacy during the final stages of the 1966-1973 military governments. At first glance, this latter action appears to have obeyed the desires of the Sapags to avoid directly confronting Perón. Nevertheless, it could also be argued, and with conviction, that the Sapags were afraid to lose the independence that they had enjoyed until then. In other words, having established their independence from Perón, why look for a different master?

In retrospect, the trajectory of the Movimiento Popular Neuquino shared certain characteristics with those of other provincial parties in Argentina: their attachment to traditional values, a caudillista

leadership, and the defense of federalism. The first two might have converted the MPN into a typical populist party of the interior, but the manner in which it implemented its federalist vision distinguished it from the rest. It is for that reason that when in June of 1993 one of its founders, Elías Sapag, died, the press called attention to his skills as a politician who had once been the leader of a political dynasty and a traditional clan, the Sapag brothers and their heirs. But at the same time, with due justice, the press emphasized that he had also been a statesman who looked to the future and who was responsible for some of the principal economic advances made by his province.³⁷

The history of the Movimiento Popular Neuquino might seem at first glance to have more to do with the history of provincial parties such as the Autonomista-Liberal in Corrientes or Bloquismo

in San Juan, local political machines with no ties to Peronism, than to the history of Peronism in the provinces. However, that is not the case. The MPN remained a Peronist organization and its history reveals certain defining elements of Peronism as a political culture and movement. Because of the appeal of Peronism as an ideology to broad sectors of Argentine society, the MPN always claimed Peronist sympathies and never renounced its Peronist identity. It is essential to bear in mind that Peronism was a multifaceted movement. Whether it manifested itself as a charismatic populism, a haven for revolutionaries, a workers' party, or, in its present guise, as representing conservative, pro-business reformism, there were certain admittedly vague but still potent postulates that attracted much of Argentine society to it. As practical politicians, the Sapags understood this and used it to their advantage.

One such postulate was the principle of "social justice" and the defense of the workers. Others were "political sovereignty," "economic independence," and an interventionist state legitimized by a populace imbued with nationalism and a strong identification between Peronism and the nation. Together, they may not have constituted an ideology abstractly defined, but they certainly did constitute what Gaetano Mosca described as a "political formula," the legal and moral principles upon which the power of a determined political movement is based and which, in Argentina's case, served to unite workers with industrialists, sectors of the military, and the church, together with farmworkers and conservative provincial politicians in pursuit of a new project for the country. If we agree on the existence of some kind of Peronist sensibility shared by many Argentines that invested Peronism with some ideological content, we can also understand, even after

Perón's fall, that there could have existed political groups that continued to find that content attractive, without fully integrating themselves into the Peronist movement or obediently following Perón's dictates. Such was the case of the MPN. In that sense, it is possible to affirm that the MPN was faithful to the true spirit of Peronism and that its mobilizing powers were based on its identification with Peronism's "political formula."

The defense of Neuquén's natural resources, the populist character of a political movement that tried to unite diverse sectors of Neuquén society in a common project, the unquestionably charismatic leadership of Elías and Felipe Sapag-all were nourished by the traditional sources of Peronism. Moreover, the confrontation that took place between the MPN and the *tendencia*-that is, the

Peronist left-in the early 1970s, besides being a power struggle for control of the province, was also an eminently Peronist ideological confrontation to determine which Peronism would establish its hegemony, the defenders of the "historic" Peronism or those of the revolutionary Peronism. But above all, the MPN was Peronist in the conception of Peronism as essentially a certain way of conducting politics, of a strong sense of the realities of power, a disregard for meddlesome entanglements and loyalties, and a great capacity for flexibility, adaptation, even opportunism in pursuit of one overriding goal: a national project that would unite all Argentines in pursuit of the country's greatness. Perhaps more than any other social actor, it is the Peronist politician who has embodied the essential core of what Peronism was and is.

So the history of the MPN reflects not only the history of powerful political dynasties in the Argentine interior; even more it represents the way in which Peronism permeated the country's political culture and was able to take root in social contexts as different as the great Buenos Aires metropolis and a relatively isolated province lacking in political traditions such as Neuquén. This was possible because Peronism was both a source of ideas and an instrument of change for many political movements in the country, among which the novel and highly successful Sapagismo must be included as one of its most interesting examples.

Notes

1. For pioneering analyses of the origins of Peronism in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Catamarca, respectively, see Ignacio Llorente, "Alianzas políticas en el surgimiento del Peronismo: El caso de la provincia de Buenos Aires," *Desarrollo*

Económico 17, no. 165 (April-June 1977); César Tcach, *Sabattinismo y peronismo: Partidos políticos en Córdoba* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1991); and Néstor Montenegro, *Los Saadi: Historia de un feudo: del 45 a María Soledad* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1991).

2. For a more detailed analysis of neo-Peronism see María Fernanda Arias and Raúl García Heras, "Carisma disperso y rebelión: Los partidos Neoperonistas," in *Perón del exilio al poder*, ed. Samuel Amaral and Mariano Ben Plotkin (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Cántaro, 1994), pp. 104-45.

3. Interview with Rodolfo Tecera del Franco, leader of the Unión Popular, Buenos Aires, May 2, 1990.

4. Vicente Palermo, *Neuquén: La creación de una sociedad* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1988), p. 11.

5. For the political characteristics of the Neuquén bourgeoisie and especially that of the Sapags, see Palermo, *Neuquén*, pp. 20-24.

6. Palermo, *Neuquén*, p. 8.

7. Interview with Oscar Albrieu, Perón's last minister of the interior and the founder of one of the leading neo-Peronist parties, the Partido de la Justicia Social, Buenos Aires, February 25, 1991.
8. "Cómo se vive en una provincia peronista," *Primera Plana*, February 4, 1964.
9. Ibid.
10. *Patria Libre* 1, no. 1 (December 17, 1963): 14.
11. *Primera Plana*, July 14, 1964, and December 15, 1964.
12. For an analysis of the close relations between neo-Peronism and the Radical government see *Primera Plana*, May 26, 1964; July 14, 1964; and December 15, 1964.
13. *Retorno*, January 21, 1965; February 11, 1965.
14. *Primera Plana*, December 28, 1971.
15. *Confirmado*, October 1, 1969.
16. Ibid., January 28, 1970.
17. See *ibid.*, January 28, 1970; and Gustavo Pontoriero, *Sacerdotes para el Tereer Mundo* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1991), 67-68.
18. For the motives behind the selection of Sapag, see *Confirmado*, March 4, 1970; and *Primera Plana*, December 28, 1971.
19. Interview with Oscar Albrieu, Buenos Aires, February 25, 1994.
20. Palermo, *Neuquén*, p. 53.

21. *Mercado*, January 7, 1971.

22. Paulino Niembro, a neo-Peronist friend of Luco, who had been a lieutenant of Augusto Vandor in the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica, apparently attempted without success to bring Felipe Sapag into the fold of the secretary of labor. See *Confirmado*, March 17, 1971.

23. *Sur Argentino*, October 27, 1971.

24. *Primera Plana*, November 2, 1971.

25. *Ibid.*, December 28, 1971.

26. The Peronist Party acquired legal status in January 1972. For more details about the "Misión Sapag," see *Primera Plana*, April 24, 1972; May 2, 1972; August 11, 1972; and August 18, 1972. See also *Siete Días*, November 17, 1982.

27. *Panorama*, February 1, 1973; *La Nación*, February 13, 1973.

28. *Análisis-Confirmado*, March 13, 1973.

29. Detailed results for the election are given in Palermo, *Neuquén*, p. 133.

30. With regard to this trade union support, see *Los Andes*, April 6, 1973; *Panorama*, April 12, 1973; *Análisis-Confirmado*, April 24, 1973; and *La Opinión*, April 25, 1973.

31. *Los Andes*, April 7, 1973.

32. *Panorama*, April 12, 1973; *La Opinión*, April 12, 1973; *Análisis-Confirmado*, April 24-30, 1973.

33. *Mayoría*, April 11, 1973.

34. For the positions of both, see *Análisis-Confirmado*, April 24-30, 1973.

35. *Clarín*, April 16, 1973; *Panorama*, April 19, 1973; *Reconstrucción*, April 18, 1973.

36. See "Neuquén: Como se vive bajo un gobierno peronista," *Primera Plana*, February 4, 1964; "El Neuquén de Sapag," *Confirmado*, December 2, 1970; and Eduardo Crawley, "El caso neuquino doce meses después," *La Opinión*, February 25, 1973; February 27, 1973; and February 28, 1973.

37. See *El Cronista Comercial*, June 22, 1993; and *Clarín*, June 22, 1993.

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Industrialists and *Bolicheros*: Business and the Peronist Populist Alliance, 1943- 1976

James P. Brennan

Nuestro camino es ancho y hermoso; es el camino de la Patria. Yen él cabemos todos: Estado, trabajadores y empresarios.

José Ber Gelbard

Peronism as a social and political movement in many ways has defined Argentine history over the last half-century. Peronism's protean capacity to mold itself to the political and cultural temper of the moment in Argentina, to absorb the diverse classes, interests, institutions, and even ideas and moods that have dominated Argentine national life, make it quite simply the pivotal point of reference for understanding the country's contemporary experience. With the exception of the landed elite, every important sector of contemporary Argentine society has passed through Peronism's ranks at some point in its history. The military, the church, the working class, middle-class university students, nationalist intellectuals, among others, have all, at various moments, found a home in Peronism. This was due in part to the limitations imposed by unrepresentative governments and even an authoritarian state on the multifarious interests of a complex society trying to break free, but also to Peronism's resiliency and ability to adapt itself to changing historical contexts and to provide the logical vehicle of expression for those interests. The Peronist populist alliance was

perpetually shifting: Today's diehard supporters frequently became tomorrow's staunchest foes, while yesterday's adversaries were later its most convinced disciples.

Among intellectuals, Peronism has frequently been viewed as the principal culprit in Argentina's rather spectacular decline from

semideveloped status and, for Latin America, an impressive institutional stability, to a country virtually synonymous with political and economic anarchy. The "what went wrong" question, however, is not only the preoccupation of professional historians, economists, and political scientists. It also amounts to an understandable national obsession. At both the intellectual and the popular level, anti-Peronists blame the movement for everything from sowing discord and class hatred in a once (mythically) pacific and harmonious society to inculcating Argentines of all classes with some very bad habits in their roles as agents of economic growth and national development. Declining rates of productivity and the widespread image of overly powerful trade unions that have blocked, indeed reversed, the country's progress are also a part of Peronism's negative image. So too is that of a coddled class of industrialists, locked in an unholy alliance with the trade unions to maintain high levels of domestic consumption and prevent foreign competition, no matter what its ultimate costs to the country's competitiveness in the world economy, and with a galling indifference to the burdening of the Argentine people with their shoddy, overpriced goods. This alliance is also said to have had its baleful effects on the country's politics, and both the Peronist regime of the 1940s and 1950s and the country's truly extraordinary political instability between 1955 and 1976 were purportedly sustained by this sinister pact, or at the very least by this unfortunate coincidence of interests. 1

The history of the role of business in Peronism, in reality, has been the subject of more conjecture than scholarly analysis. As Mariano Plotkin noted in Chapter 2, the industrialists' role in the populist alliance remains one of the least studied facets of Peronism.² The

term "business" is preferable to "industrialists," as this essay will try to show that the bourgeois component of the populist alliance was more complex than has generally been thought and was not limited to the support of a new industrial class but included important agrarian and commercial components. The role played specifically by the industrialists, both old and new, must also be clarified, and the history of the Confederación General Económica (CGE), the businessmen's umbrella organization created by Perón in 1952 and generally recognized as the principal institutional representative of the Peronist bourgeoisie, must be especially illuminated.

This essay will advance two principal ideas with respect to the role played by business in Peronism. First, the common belief of new versus old industrialists as a source of Perón's support from

1943 to 1955 is, in many ways, the counterpart to the now discredited arguments of a new versus old working class in explaining Perón and Peronism. In fact, Perón enjoyed some degree of support from both old and new sectors of the Argentine industrial bourgeoisie. Second and more important, on the premise that the history of the Confederación General Económica is in need of a major interpretative revision, it will be argued that the CGE and the role it played in the Peronist populist alliance from 1952 until 1976 had more to do with the disarticulation of the provincial economies than strictly with import-substitution industrialization, the "hot-house industrialization" that Carlos Waisman speaks of. The appeal of a nationalist ideology for the small businessmen of the interior must be considered in any study of the CGE's history. As a corollary to this reinterpretation of the CGE, the model that it proposed for modernizing the country's economic structures must be considered with greater objectivity, particularly in light of the catastrophic failure of the monetarist economic programs of the military governments during the *Proceso* (1976-1983) and of subsequent governments to reverse the reversal of development. At the very least, the role that the CGE played in contemporary Argentine politics needs to be analyzed with a more solid historical reconstruction.

Industrialists and Perón

The role played by industrialists in the rise of Peronism and by their support for the Peronist regime has undergone several interpretations. In the 1960s, Torcuato Di Tella first argued that an "antistatus quo elite" composed essentially of new industrialists had been instrumental in supporting the 1943 coup that had brought

the army, and a young officer named Juan Perón, to power. 3 This interpretation was echoed by Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero in their influential *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*, in which they argued that the origins of Peronism were to be found in a polyclass alliance that included new industrialists who had emerged as a consequence of import-substitution industrialization in the 1930s.⁴ A few years after Di Tella's analysis, another Argentine, Dardo Cúneo, the author of what remains the most important study of business in national politics, presented a quite different interpretation. Cúneo stressed the opposition from the Unión Industrial Argentina (UIA), then the country's principal industrialists' association, especially its displeasure with the military government's

labor policies, culminating in the disastrous attempt by the UIA to help finance Perón's opponents in the upcoming presidential elections and the unsuccessful three-day employer lockout in January 1946.⁵ The weakness of the industrialists' support in the formative period of the Peronist coalition was given credence by U.S. embassy intelligence reports in Buenos Aires during the months of Perón's rise to power, and confirmed in subsequent scholarly studies.⁶

It is necessary, however, to distinguish between the role of industrialists in the rise of Perón and their relationship with the Peronist state during the decade it was in power. Despite the revisionists' arguments, it is quite clear that while Perón was in power, industrialists did not oppose the regime, and that a working relationship if not an outright alliance with some industrialists did exist.⁷ Industrialists as a class naturally did not oppose a regime that did much to promote their interests. Though industrialists' gross profit margins declined between 1946 and 1948 as a result of the government's labor and wage policies, the rate of capital return greatly increased. Credits to the private sector, for example, increased 30 percent in 1947 and 15 percent in 1948, mostly in manufacturing. This essentially subsidized the wage increases that Perón labor policies encouraged. The participation of industry in bank loans alone in a banking system that was nationalized in 1946 also increased from 28 percent to 55 percent between 1945 and 1950.⁸ Profits in industry between 1946 and 1955 were among the highest in the country's history to that point, and it benefited not just a new class of industrialists but the established firms as well. Big business received its share of subsidies and bank credits and profited just as much as new industrialists did from protectionism

and numerous government policies that increased the size of the domestic market.⁹

Even if we accept the proposition that the UIA's positions during 1945-46 represented those of the country's industrialists as a whole, there are a number of problems with the revisionists' arguments. Much of the confusion surrounding the role of the industrialists is due to the failure to recognize the splits within the industrialists' ranks, including those within the UIA itself. The UIA, despite its name, had not been born, properly speaking, as an industrialists' organization, but rather represented the dominant economic interests of the capital city and Buenos Aires province-that is, the dominant economic interests of the country. In the early years of the organization's history it was, in fact, dominated by the landed

elite and, despite verbal support for protectionism, never adopted a strictly pro-industrial program. Although by the 1940s industrialists did control the UIA's executive committee, the organization continued to include among its members the country's leading agricultural, financial, and commercial as well as industrial interests, each with close links to one another.¹⁰

By the start of World War II the UIA's ideology had become more strictly pro-industrial, one imbued with a nationalist discourse that extolled "economic independence" via industrialization.¹¹ The rapid growth of industry during the war contributed to a movement in that direction. The UIA had warmly received many of the military government's pro-industrial measures (the creation of a separate Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the establishment of the Banco de Crédito Industrial with UIA vice president Ernesto Herbin named its first director to mention just two) and had supported the government's economic policies in general.¹² Nonetheless, industrialists still depended too much on the fortunes of the agro-export sector for foreign exchange and capital goods for them to pose any fundamental challenge to the established economic model. Although as the war drew to a close the UIA continued to demand vigorous state intervention to ensure industrial survival support for modernizing the country's factories, creating base industries, and mediating in labor-capital relations it was also voicing greater criticisms of the military government, especially of its labor policies and their architect, Col. Juan Domingo Perón.¹³ By early 1945 the UIA was increasingly critical of specific measures promulgated by the government, such as the establishment of fixed wage scales (*escalafón*), the elimination of piecework, and the closed shop rule. It also criticized Perón's use of

"a certain terminology" that presented every collective bargaining agreement as a "conquest" won from a supposedly miserly business sector.¹⁴

The UIA's decision to join the opposition forces and participate in the early 1946 employer lockout, along with those employer organizations representing agriculture and commerce, was also greatly influenced by the unique political situation in the country in late 1945: The war had just ended and prodemocratic sentiment was on the rise in the country. The opposition sparked by Executive Decree 33,302, which, among other things, established a National Wage Council for purposes of implementing a living minimum wage and enforcing the end-of-year bonus (the *aguinaldo*), allowed the business community in general to label the measure a "politically inspired" decree that responded to a "totalitarian project." The

UIA presented its opposition as being as much in support of democracy as a defense of business interests. ¹⁵ However, given Argentine industrialists' historical lack of representation in any of the established political parties and their overriding concern for protecting their economic interests, it is at least plausible to argue that there was less enthusiasm for this impending democratic restoration among them than has been assumed.¹⁶

Indeed, there was greater dissent within the UIA about participation in the anti-Perón Unión Democrática forces than has generally been recognized. Some of the established industrialists, eager to promote industry more vigorously and with little sympathy for the country's traditional agro-export elite, had deep reservations about such a vigorous opposition to Perón. They, along with other UIA members locked in a power struggle for control of the organization, were the ones who lost control of the UIA to the hardline anti-Peronists in the organization in an April 29, 1946, election.¹⁷ Many of these same industrialists would later go on to join the regime-sponsored Asociación Argentina de la Producción, Industria y Comercio (AAPIC), and the Congreso Empresario Argentino (CEA).¹⁸ Perón's industrial support did certainly include new industrial interests, the classic import-substitution industrialization (ISI) industrialists, many of them never members of the UIA, who benefited from wartime shortages as well as from the tariff protection, bank credits, and exchange permits that the government now made available to them, but it also included some established industrialists. The UIA itself, even after having opposed Perón, was immediately urging his recently elected government to make good on its promises and continue to protect industry and maintain exchange controls for industry's benefit.¹⁹

Indeed, the considerable delay in abolishing the UIA (it would not be abolished until 1953) indicates an attempt on the part of Perón and those of the country's established industrialists who remained in the organization to find some common ground and to cooperate with one another.

The 1945-46 conjuncture, even reduced to the history of the UIA, is thus considerably more complicated than Horowitz, Kenworthy, and others in recent years have suggested; the Di Tella and Murmis-Portantiero thesis, though it was greatly overblown, should not be dismissed as completely mistaken. The truth appears to lie somewhere in the middle of these conflicting interpretations. Moreover, as I have already indicated, this dispute clouds the real issue: the role of industrialists in the Peronist governing alliance between 1946 and 1955. What can generally be said is that, while Perón was

in power, industrialists' support for the regime varied with how a given industry's interests were benefited or harmed by Perón's policies. Generally, the largest industries, with operations concentrated in Buenos Aires, close links to foreign capital, and production for the export market, opposed Perón. The country's most important industry, meat-packing, was uniformly hostile to the government's economic policies, as was the flour-milling industry.²⁰ But even among the smaller industrial interests there were divisions between supporters and opponents of the regime, again according to how a specific industrial sector's interests were affected by Peronist economic policies. For example, the two principal metalworking trade associations were divided between the pro-Peronist light manufacturers producing consumer products (refrigerators, stoves, electric fans, auto parts, and so on), who benefited from the expanding consumer market, and the anti-Peronist manufacturers of heavy industrial products (machinery and equipment), who objected to the government's policy of liberally importing machinery and equipment that the consumer goods' industrialists needed.²¹ A similar division existed in the textile industry, where the manufacturers of clothing who benefited from the expanding market but used the domestically produced wool and cotton fibers differed from the anti-Peronist textile industrialists who depended on imported fibers (silk and synthetics) and were hurt by the government's restrictions on their importation.²²

The history of the Cámara Argentina de Industrias Metalúrgicas, the employers' organization representing the manufacturers of consumer durables and that sector of the metalworking industry most favorably disposed to Perón's government, reveals both the

usefulness and limitations of looking at the industrialists' response to Perón strictly on the basis of sectoral interests. The industry was strongly supportive of Peronist economic policies, especially with regard to tariff protection, favorable exchange rates, and ample credit via the Banco Industrial, as well as Peronist social policies that led to a notable redistribution of income in the country and greatly expanded the domestic market. Yet the ideological identification of the metallurgical industrialists with the Peronist revolution should not be dismissed as merely cynical or self-serving. Peronist popular nationalism was not something that resonated solely among the working class; it affected many groups and classes. Justicialist ideology held some appeal for industrialists as well. Moreover, there are many concrete examples of the industry's identification with specific acts of Peronist economic nationalism, such

as with Perón's nationalization of the railroads, which was enthusiastically supported by the industry, although ideology was, predictably, never far away from self-interest. The Cámara also expressed its hope that the local metallurgical industry would be enabled to fulfill the public railroads' demand for spare parts and rolling stock.²³ Perhaps the most telling example of the coincidence between ideology and self-interest is the participation and support for Perón's two five-year plans. The Cámara was one of the most enthusiastic champions of the ideals of the five-year plans: support for "national" industry, state intervention to break industrial bottlenecks, the development of heavy industry, and the pursuit of "economic independence."²⁴ When Perón attempted to organize the country's industrialists into a pro-Peronist Confederación de la Industria (CI), leading metallurgical industrialists such as Alquiles Merlini, Torcuato Sozio Di Tella (nephew of Torcuato, Sr.), Alberto O. Schärer, Roberto van Gelderen, and Marcos Zimmerman, all members of the Cámara, were elected to its first executive council. Merlini, in fact, was named the CI's first president.²⁵

Tensions arose with the Peronist government as time went by, however, and put strict limits on support for the regime or ideological identification with *Justicialismo*. The most serious problems were still those resulting from Perón's labor policies. By 1947, the Cámara was already complaining of the activities of the shop stewards' organizations, the *comisiones obreras*, which were having a supposedly negative effect on shop floor discipline, "undermining completely the purpose for which they had been established and transforming themselves into a source of disorder, indiscipline, and anarchy."²⁶ The industry also frequently

complained about what it considered to be excessive wage increases granted to workers in collective bargaining negotiations, absenteeism, and closed-shop rules.²⁷ By 1949, with the industry fully aware of an impending crisis, it offered its solutions: state abstention in labor-capital relations ("allowing the interested parties to act freely in the negotiating of collective bargaining agreements") and state intervention to serve industry's needs ("submitting all imports to a set of rules regulating importing licenses and subject to the requirement that such goods are not manufactured in the country").²⁸

By this point, perhaps resigned to the idea that wage increases were going to be a permanent part of industrial relations in Peronist Argentina, and, moreover, that within certain limits they benefited their interests, the metalworking industrialists began to demand that wage increases be commensurate with increases in productivity.²⁹

The Cámara increasingly attributed its inability to compete in foreign markets, or survive on its own without state protection, to the obstructionism of the *comisiones obreras*, low worker productivity, and generally higher labor costs.³⁰ The metallurgical industry, given the large labor forces it employed and its limited access to foreign technology, was perhaps the most outspoken of any on the need for rationalization and greater labor productivity.³¹ Bit by bit, labor-capital relations in the industry deteriorated. By Perón's second administration, the "social function" of capital that the metalworking industrialists seemed to support was little more than the idea of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

There were other problems. By the time of Perón's second administration, the exhaustion of the original Peronist model of economic growth based on a redistribution of income via wage increases to the working class and industrial promotion by increasing domestic consumption, subsidies, bank credits, and protectionism was apparent to the government and to the country's industrialists alike. Perón attempted to adapt, as the terms of the second five-year plan make clear, with an emphasis on increased labor productivity, encouragement of agricultural exports and greater receptivity to foreign capital. The country's industrialists regarded these adjustments in an ambiguous fashion. Although fully in agreement with plans to increase labor productivity, they were suspicious (with the exception of those industries closely tied to the export sector, such as the meat-packing industry) of any redistribution of income away from industry and back to agriculture. Manufacturers of washing machines and refrigerators, for example, complained of government plans to lower tariffs on their goods, or to restrict the importation of the sheet metal

necessary for manufacturing their products in the absence of a national steel industry.³² Similarly, the "Sección Fabricantes de Maquinaria Agrícola y sus Repuestos," one of the most powerful interest groups within the Cámara by the early 1950s, protested the government's plans to mechanize agriculture and improve productivity by importing, without tariffs, foreign-manufactured agricultural machinery.³³ Industrialists had also begun to look with increasing suspicion on the country's growing public sector, the state-owned industries that were now competing with the private sector. Industrialists criticized, for example, the production of electric motors and other industrial products in the Cordoban military factories as representing an unnecessary competition that hurt domestic industry and stymied national industrial development.³⁴ With such tensions on the rise, it is perhaps not

surprising that the metallurgical industrialists expressed a mild approval of Perón's overthrow in 1955, criticizing the abuse of state power under his regime but also forewarning that such abuses should not be used as an excuse to establish a radical liberal economic program that would leave Argentine industry unprotected and lead to a return to a pastoral Argentina. 35

Other industries and industrialists were even more critical of Perón and Peronist policies than were those in the metalworking industries. As a result, Perón's efforts to organize industrialists into a progovernment organization were only partly successful. After the government's intervention of the UIA on May 17, 1946, Perón established the AAPIC to institutionalize the support of those business groups, both within and outside the UIA, disposed to cooperating with the regime. The AAPIC's structure included not only industry but also commercial and agrarian interests and revealed Perón's intention to court business interests broadly and to strengthen the polyclass basis of his regime and its corporatist representation. Ideologically, the members of the AAPIC may have identified with some facets of Perón's concept of the "organized community" and his economic nationalism. The AAPIC consistently defended state intervention in the economy and the harmonization of class interests, and it employed a political vocabulary that stressed "solidarity," "defense of the nation," and attacks against "selfish individualism."³⁶ Its programmatic statements revealed more a sympathy for a corporatist system than the classic liberalism espoused by the UIA: "We must face with resolve the social problem. Harmony among farmers, commerce, and industry. Harmony between capital and labor in order that the latter might achieve its material comfort and the former realize its

role as the promoter of progress. Harmony with the State, which we want to be vigilant regarding the country's economic and social problems in order that all might carry out the specific role that belongs to them in pursuit of the country's prosperity."³⁷

The depth of this ideological affinity, however, should not be overstated. As an organization, the AAPIC never fully identified with the Peronist state. Images of Perón and Evita may have appeared frequently in its publications, and public displays of fealty to the regime were numerous, but genuine ideological sympathy among most of the members was shallow. Nor did the AAPIC display much enthusiasm for embarking on a national organizational drive of the country's businessmen as Perón was urging, fearful that such a national organization would diminish the influence of

the Buenos Aires companies that had dominated the UIA and continued to do so in the AAPIC. The organization's principal preoccupations were, predictably, not promoting Justicialist doctrine but market conditions, problems with transport, credit and supplies, and collective bargaining negotiations. Most likely, the AAPIC embraced a tepid Peronism and a working relationship with Perón for purposes of economic survival. Moreover, the government's control over the organization was always weak, and the AAPIC did not hesitate to criticize the regime, particularly on issues of wages and prices, since the industries represented in the organization often were not large enough for the shop floor control issues to figure prominently in their grievances.³⁸ Finally, since many of the country's most powerful businessmen in both industry and agriculture refused to join the organization, it scarcely fit Perón's purposes.

It was the inability to transform the AAPIC into a powerful, pro-Peronist businessmen's association that prompted Perón to disband the organization and establish the CEA in its stead. Like the AAPIC, the CEA represented essentially Buenos Aires economic interests, although unlike the AAPIC it did manage to add to its membership some of the more powerful holdouts from the disbanded UIA, such as the metalworking company SIAM-Di Tella, Pirelli, the country's largest manufacturer of rubber tires, and the Loma Negra cement company.³⁹ Its direct lineage to the UIA was demonstrated in its relentless lobbying for the relegalization of that organization and by proposals that its own industrial Cámara and the UIA be merged, as well as that the newly reconstituted industrialists' association work out of the UIA's former headquarters.⁴⁰ Like the AAPIC, it was principally occupied with

ensuring good relations with the regime, lobbying in its members' behalf, and redefining the relationship between business and the state in Perón's Argentina. One typical concern can be seen in a survey among the members regarding discrimination and obstacles to bank credits from the country's newly nationalized banking system.⁴¹

As with the AAPIC, there may have existed some ideological sympathy for Peronism. At the founding ceremony of the CEA in August 1948, the organization publicly stated as one of its aims obtaining "social legislation that would respond to an ideal of cooperation and understanding between capital and labor." It also promoted a wider vision of industrial planning than the old UIA ever had, urging for example the formation of a national system of industrial schools to create a more skilled labor force and proposing

its own program to sponsor lectures and to finance scholarships with the goal of promoting and disseminating technological and scientific knowledge in Argentina. Other projects, such as the Instituto de Trabajo (set up to study all problems related to work and industrial relations), and its support for close cooperation with the government to research trends in international business and devise foreign marketing strategies for Argentine products, reveal a new kind of businessmen's organization.⁴² But, as with the AAPIC, the CEA functioned mainly as a lobbyist and pressure group with the Peronist state, working in behalf of the country's established business interests, especially industrial interests.

Though the CEA represented overwhelmingly *porteño* firms, within a few months of its founding it was already under pressure from the businessmen of the interior to open its ranks. The rivalry between the small businessmen of the interior and Buenos Aires had been apparent for some time. Throughout the years between 1946 and 1950, businessmen's associations had been mobilizing in the interior, particularly in the northwest, a prosperous region during the colonial period closely linked to the Potosí silver mines, and from the late nineteenth century one with a flourishing sugar industry protected by the national government but now in economic decline. The early mobilizations of provincial businessmen, predominantly owners of retail establishments but also including small agriculturalists and industrialists, were initially strictly defensive: to protest the government's tax policies and especially the wage increases it had supported (now granted in state-sponsored collective bargaining agreements), measures that were unwelcome to the businesses of opulent Buenos Aires but considered catastrophic by the small businessmen of the interior.

They soon moved beyond protest over these immediate problems, however, and attempted to participate in Peronist economic planning. In 1946, in Santiago del Estero, the Primer Congreso de Planificación del Norte Argentino was held, bringing together businessmen from the northwest to participate in drafting proposals and mobilizing support for Perón's first five-year plan. In December 1948 the northwest chapters of the former AAPIC organized the Congreso Económico del Norte and formed the Federación Económica del Norte Argentino (FENA) to address the region's special problems.⁴³

In May of 1950 the members of the FENA, along with representatives from provinces such as Córdoba, Santa Fe, San Juan, San Luis, Chaco, and Mendoza, met in Catamarca to hold the second Congreso Económico del Norte and sign the Act of Catamarca,

pledging support for the formation of a national businessmen's organization dedicated to regional development and economic federalism. That pledge was realized later that same year, in December 1950, when small businessmen from throughout the provinces met in Mendoza and formed the Confederación Argentina de la Producción, la Industria y el Comercio (CAPIC), an organization pledged to represent strictly provincial interests. The two 1950 gatherings also turned out to be forums for the expression of the general grievances of the provinces, as well as their deep federalist sentiment. A marked class animosity also was present and soon these small businessmen were proudly flaunting their status as *bolicheros*, small-time peddlers, self-made men, and business hustlers, adopting with enthusiasm what had been an early scornful characterization of them made by the Buenos Aires business elite, much as the Peronist working class had proudly adopted its identity as the oncescorned *descamisados*.

By early 1950, it was clear that Perón's plans to create a single businessmen's organization based on the country's dominant economic interests had failed. The legacy of the effects of the 1930s depression on many of the provinces, the poor integration of the interior into the national economy and its continued subordination to Buenos Aires, added now to the indignation sparked by the regime's tax and wage policies and the potential bankruptcies they threatened, mobilized the small businessmen in such unlikely places such as Salta, Catamarca, and the Chaco. 44 Soon thereafter, CAPIC representatives began to attend the CEA's plenaries and to express their wishes that the organization concern itself with the interior's problems. From the beginning, the sugar-producing interests of the northwest would be particularly vocal in

their demands for government attention to their problems. Transportation was a special concern, especially the dilapidated condition of the Ferrocarril de Salta to Antofagasta in Chile, a vital outlet for the northwest sugar economies, which local businessmen felt could be revitalized only through government intervention and public investment. The cotton, tea, and *yerba mate* growers of the northeast provinces also demanded redress for inadequate transportation and especially for the lack of adequate storage facilities for their products.⁴⁵ In the third Congreso Económico del Norte, held in Resistencia in 1951, the subjects under discussion expressed the concerns of the country's small businessmen: problems with credit, industrial promotion, and transportation.⁴⁶ Little by little, these regional economic interests, from the northwest and northeast in particular, gained influence

within the CEA, and Perón's business support took on a distinctly provincial character. The CAPIC itself developed beyond a defensive organization into one imbued with a genuine federalist sentiment that found in certain elements of Peronist economic policies, especially their emphasis on promoting the domestic market and an active role for the government in economic development, principles with which it could identify.

The Revolt of the Provinces

The CEA, despite the growing influence of the interior, nevertheless continued to be dominated by *porteño* businessmen. Perón, always sensitive to the shifting moods and political conditions in his country, began to pressure the CEA to organize all the country's businessmen and to undertake a registration campaign that would leave no business activity outside the government's aspiring corporatist structure. The changing fortunes of the Peronist state themselves demanded it. By the early 1950s, the government's weaknesses were already becoming apparent. A solid businessmen's front was necessary to respond effectively to increased labor demands and to prevent divisions within the ranks of capital. Perón wished to discipline business in order to avoid problems such as the recent capitulation of some textile industrialists to union pressure in collective bargaining negotiations and the inflationary pressures their wage increases added to the economy. 47 The CEA's failure to act as a dynamic businessmen's Cámara prompted Perón to take the initiative and sponsor a December 1951 conference at the University of Buenos Aires Law School to discuss the reorganization of the country's businessmen's associations, culminating in the creation of three national business

confederations divided by sector (industry, commerce, and agriculture). In August of the following year, the government established the Confederación General Económica (CGE), forcing the reluctant members of the CEA to join the latter organization.⁴⁸

The CGE's formation was not strictly Perón's handiwork. The mobilization of provincial businessmen between 1946 and 1950 had occurred independently of any initiative by Perón—in fact, initially against his wishes. Moreover, Peronist economic policies between 1946 and 1951 had created new provincial interests, established a new class of industrialists, and made farmers out of one-time sharecroppers and owners of retail establishments out of former shop clerks. These people demanded representation, a representation that

was also imbued with the strong federalist sentiments so powerful in the provinces. Indeed, the CAPIC members had responded to Perón's initiative with more enthusiasm than he had ever expected, organizing "economic federations" at the grass-roots level throughout the interior to elect members to the three national confederations that together would choose the CGE national leadership.

The CGE membership was drawn predominantly from the ranks of the now-departed CAPIC; and a *provinciano* and former traveling salesman destined to be the dominant figure in the organization over the next two decades, José Ber Gelbard, was named the organization's first president. Gelbard, a retail store owner from Catamarca and the son of Polish Jewish immigrants, was destined to become the "national bourgeoisie's" principal ideologue and most articulate advocate of an alliance between business and labor, and a federalist economic program. Shortly after Gelbard's election, Perón passed Law 14.295, the famous Law of Professional Associations of Employers, establishing one employer's organization per industrial sector to negotiate with labor-capital's equivalent to a similar right/obligation that Perón had granted the trade unions-and laying down the procedures for collective bargaining negotiations. 49 Both business and labor were to sit on the government's Economic Advisory Commission, an idea that, to judge from the CGE's internal debates, was quite welcomed by the businessmen's organization.⁵⁰

Ideologically, the small businessmen from the interior who dominated the CGE found much in Peronist ideology that they sympathized with. The antiliberalism and nationalism of these

businessmen were their outstanding ideological characteristics.⁵¹ Perón's idea of the "organized community" and the social, national responsibilities of capital had great appeal for individuals who had seen the country's economic policies dominated by the traditional Buenos Aires elite and their British partners under the guise of laissez-faire economics.⁵² While the provincial economies struggled during the Great Depression of the 1930s and only partially recovered during the war, that of Buenos Aires survived and then flourished. In the provinces, where the "labor question" was only now becoming known and where even a successful businessman like Gelbard was often only a generation removed from the humblest of beginnings and frequently lived little better than his employees or workers, Perón's anti-oligarchic discourse was positively exhilarating. To address the distortions resulting from Buenos Aires's century-long domination of the national economy and to re-establish a genuine

economic federalism, these small businessmen supported state planning and some kind of a corporatist structure: "If for organized labor individual action turned out to be ineffective, there is no way that it can be anything but the same for business. At the present moment, economic undertakings are not an individual effort but that of organized entities with functional affinities." 53

The CGE was a persistent advocate of the "gremialization" of business, of the need to "organize" and "harmonize" the interests of capital for the greater good of the nation. Peronist economic planning, whether in the form of the state grain-buying board (IAPI), the five-year plans, or the activities of the Banco Industrial, received its warmest accolades. Foreign capital was to be carefully regulated and encouraged in those areas beyond the means of national capital in order to introduce new methods of production and new technologies but always within carefully prescribed limits and in accordance with a national economic plan.⁵⁴ As with the history of the AAPIC and the CEA, the relationship with the CGE and Perón was one of mutual advantage. Perón received the support of business for his policies, while the CGE's members were able to advance their interests through the state without the organization's ever being fully absorbed by the Peronist government's very rickety corporatist structures, although the pressures were building on the organization by the time of Perón's overthrow in 1955. The coup may well have saved the CGE from a total absorption by the Peronist state. The CGE's internal proceedings are strikingly absent of paeans to Perón or gestures of allegiance to the regime. The moment of silence called in honor of Eva Perón at her death was the closest thing to such a gesture, while on many occasions the CGE took great pains to stress that its

support for the state as an entity necessary to foment economic integration and development, and therefore of the government's policies, did not mean adherence to a political party (that is, the Justicialist Party).⁵⁵ But there was greater ideological affinity between the Peronist state and the CGE than there had been with previous businessmen's organizations. Whether the CGE or Gelbard were or were not Peronist is immaterial. Gelbard himself claimed to be a member of the Radical Party, and there is even some evidence of a friendly relationship with the Communists.⁵⁶ What is clear is an ideological compatibility and the interests of both in establishing organic links between business and the state.

The CGE was unquestionably dominated by small businessmen from the provinces, although in these early years there was a

sizable representation of *porteño* interests, even some of the larger ones: members of the Bolsa de Comercio, the UIA, and Sociedad Rural who wished to retain good relations with the government.⁵⁷ In the first six months of 1953, however, Gelbard traveled throughout the provinces to organize provincial "federations" in preparation for the upcoming elections of the CGE national leadership, and the organization's first executive committee, elected on August 16, 1953, was heavily weighted in favor of the provinces.⁵⁸ Once in power, the CGE executive body continued to devote the bulk of its organizing efforts to the provinces, and Gelbard led organizing delegations to Paraná, Santa Fe, Rosario, Mendoza, Catamarca, Tucumán, Jujuy, Salta, Río Negro, Córdoba, San Juan, and San Luis between June 1954 and May 1955.⁵⁹ The CGE also took an interest in the country's unsettled regions and established the Comisión de Zonas Menos Desarrollados, holding conferences in Comodoro Rivadavia and La Rioja in 1954 and in March 1955 sponsoring the first Congreso Económico de la Patagonia.⁶⁰

The disadvantage of receiving its sustenance from the provinces was that the CGE was subsequently under unremitting pressure to resolve the interior's severe economic problems, a situation that caused great tension among its members, each representing a regional economy with interests not necessarily compatible with those of the other members. For example, the small Tucumán sugar producers repeatedly insisted that the CGE devote itself to a program to ensure price supports for their industry, while wine producers from Mendoza and San Juan demanded the same for their industry. In two cases, Gelbard resolutely refused to commit the organization to a campaign for sugar price supports while the

CGE balked at an employers' strike by the wine producers in demand of the same.⁶¹

The CGE's structure was very much in keeping with Perón's concept of the "organized community." The organization's three divisions, the Confederación de Industria (industry), the Confederación de Comercio (commerce), and the Confederación de Producción (agriculture) were organized at the grass-roots level, usually through local chambers of commerce, which elected provincial federations. The provincial federations elected the three national confederations that chose the CGE central body, with industry, commerce, and agriculture given equal representation on the CGE executive committee. They also sent representatives of their own, two per province, who sat on the CGE executive committee, thereby ensuring the preponderant influence of the provinces. At all these

levels, businesses, no matter what their size, were given equal representation, a situation that meant that small business dominated the organization although big business largely subsidized it, as every enterprise had to contribute 0.1 percent of its annual profits to the CGE's coffers.⁶² The CGE executive committee, in turn, sat on the government's Comisión Económica Consultiva through membership on the latter's myriad subcommittees (prices, housing, foreign commerce, cost of living, transport, labor relations, and others) to provide counsel on government policy. The CGE exercised a considerable degree of influence on government economic policy in the final years of Perón's government. For example, in 1954 the Central Bank decided to grant imports for industrial machinery on the basis of plans prepared jointly by the government and the CGE.⁶³ On the other hand, the CGE's federalism, democratic practices, and reliance on the small businessmen of the interior meant that it never fit squarely with Perón's purposes.⁶⁴

Perón's determination to establish a solid businessmen's organization was not strictly a result of his interest in strengthening the political base of his movement. The conjunctural crisis, the severe economic problems of his second administration, also weighed heavily. Nowhere was his interest in disciplining the unruly ways of business shown better than in his conflict with the textile industry. The CGE was early assigned the task of getting both manufacturers and retailers in that industry to establish some restraint over prices.⁶⁵ Above all, however, Perón used the CGE to strengthen business in order to lessen his dependence on the unions and reverse declining labor productivity and increasing labor demands. The CGE stressed the concept of the "social function" of

the business enterprise and was not behaving cynically in its claim to be deeply concerned with improving the standard of living of the working class. A thriving working class and expanding domestic market obviously suited the interests of the membership of the CGE, but there was some genuine sympathy with the concept of social justice as an instrument of national integration and Argentine glory.

Still, there were limits to class conciliation. Although the public discourse of the CGE stressed such ideas as "integration," "a social economy," and "a patriotic business sector," in its actual dealings with labor the organization was somewhat more conventional. The CGE took less of a hard line as regards wage issues, since the majority of its members depended on a robust market for their survival. Rather, taxes, productivity, and shop floor issues the latter increasingly important because of the growth of its industrial wing

generally revealed that their ultimate allegiance was to the profitability of their own enterprises. The CGE took a firm position on the need to match increased wages with increased productivity in order to avoid inflation, a position it would maintain consistently from its origins through the *Pacto Social* of the Peronist government of the 1970s. Its internal debates and publications reveal that its members were most critical of precisely this facet of the government's economic policies of its failure to maintain "balance," "order," and "reciprocity" in the collective bargaining process and to link wage hikes to increased productivity. 66

As time went on, the CGE widened the scope of its criticisms. The CGE's industrial wing became increasingly critical of the growing power of the unions in the workplace, objecting, for example, to the obligatory membership of foremen and technical personnel in the unions and the deleterious effect that had on labor discipline and productivity. Similarly, it complained about the abuse of the labor courts and what it derisively referred to as the *industria de despido*, which reputedly caused workers to provoke dismissal in order to receive handsome indemnities.⁶⁷ Nor were its criticisms restricted to the shop floor. Soon it began to oppose the broad array of the government's social welfare programs and populist economics generally. The CGE, for example, attacked Peronist housing policies and blamed rent control for the country's severe housing shortage, arguing that the elimination of rent control was essential if private enterprise were to solve the housing problem.⁶⁸ Not even the seemingly sacrosanct Peronist trade union structure was immune from criticism, and the CGE proposed a revision of the industrial unionism established by Perón and its replacement

with a more flexible system that allowed for the creation of "horizontal" that is, craft-unions for skilled workers.⁶⁹

Perón was generally sympathetic to entreaties from business and likewise wished to curb the power of unions in the factory and to increase productivity. One of his first overtures regarding industry's concerns about productivity had been the creation in 1952 of the Universidad Obrera Nacional, with its main campus in the industrial suburb of Avalleneda and branch campuses throughout the country. The purpose of this "worker university" was to foster scientific and technological education and thereby create a more highly skilled and presumably more productive labor force. In the statutes of the university, the board of directors was to include industrialists who were to influence curriculum development.⁷⁰ As part of Perón's initiative to foster scientific and technological

education, the government also established the Centro Nacional de Documentación Científica y Técnica to disseminate scientific and technological knowledge among the business community, and it created attachés in science and technology at Argentine embassies in the most developed countries for purposes of keeping abreast of the latest advances in those fields.

It was also Perón, not the CGE, who proposed the calling of two "productivity congresses" to redress the problems in the workplace resulting from his own labor policies.⁷¹ Along with the CGT, the CGE cosponsored the August 23-28, 1954, first Congreso de Organización y Relaciones del Trabajo. The CGE's sponsorship of this conference was not a purely defensive measure. It had long been interested in American concepts of scientific management and in organizational reforms, and in fact it had criticized the UIA on numerous occasions not only for the latter's monopolistic practices but also for its traditional management approach and "paternalistic" style, both of which the CGE considered obstacles to the creation of a modern industrial culture.⁷² But the conference was largely intended to redress the balance of power in the workplace, now perceived to be too heavily weighted in favor of the unions. In Gelbard's opening speech, this was expressed somewhat ambiguously when the CGE declared the purpose of the conference to be the achievement of the "humanized rationalization" of the factory necessary to raise productivity high enough to meet wage demands that business was finding increasingly burdensome.⁷³ The conference's sessions were devoted to issues of industrial relations such as industrial psychology, productivity incentives, training programs, and the scientific organization of the firm. Despite Gelbard's expressed interest in a "humanized" rationalization, the

conference's principal suggestion was rather more conventional: the adoption of carefully timed piecework systems to compensate for the technological limitations of Argentine factories and for the 10 percent decline in per capita production that the CGE said had occurred in Argentine factories between 1943 and 1953.⁷⁴

The second and more celebrated "productivity congress," the Congreso Nacional de Productividad y Bienestar Social, held March 21-31, 1955, was also called at Perón's insistence and was received with somewhat less enthusiasm by the CGE, which was doubtful now of the possibility of implementing rationalization and productivity schemes given the Peronist state's greater reliance on the working class and the trade unions for its support in the midst of growing opposition to his regime. Nonetheless, the CGE repeated

its insistence on the need to redress the balance of power in the workplace so as to improve productivity and overcome the structural bottlenecks in Argentine industry, and it agreed to participate in the congress.⁷⁵ Once again, theories of scientific management and the techniques of industrial reform were discussed in a ten-day conference.⁷⁶ Out of the congress emerged the Acuerdo Nacional de Productividad and the Instituto Nacional de Productividad, the latter to monitor the implementation of the former with representatives from business and labor sitting together in permanent consultation. The proceedings of the congress itself, however, revealed the real obstacles to any consensus between business and labor on rationalization and productivity. The suggestions of unions, such as those of the light and power workers, the textile workers, and the construction workers, as to how to make their industries more efficient invariably placed the full responsibility for any problems with efficiency and productivity on management. The construction workers' union, for example, suggested that the major problems in their industry were seasonal employment and subcontracting, and urged their abolition.⁷⁷

The *Empresariado Nacional* in the Opposition and in Power

Suspicious of Perón's intentions and perhaps aware of the impossibility of realizing a balance at this point between business and labor under his regime, the CGE reacted to the fall of Perón in 1955 with relative indifference. It did not stage an employers' strike and sought to maintain good relations with the new public authorities. During the anti-Peronist reaction of General Pedro Aramburu's government (1955-1958), however, those institutions

most closely associated with the antiliberal animus of the fallen regime, among them the CGE, suffered the greatest repression. Like the CGT, the CGE was intervened in October 1955 and outlawed in December of that same year. It would not be resuscitated until June 1958. In the interim, the country's capitalist classes would experience dramatic changes. The arrival of multinational corporations, especially in the automobile, steel, and petrochemical industries, transformed the country's industrial structure, particularly in the provinces, where many multinational enterprises chose to establish their operations. New businessmen's associations appeared, often representing industries that had initially worked as suppliers to the

multinationals, organizations such as the Asociación de Industriales Metalúrgicos de Córdoba, soon to emerge as the power in the industrial wing of the CGE, albeit one with very independent ways. Indeed, after 1955 the CGE would depend for even more of its support on the provinces, but with provincial industrialists exercising much greater influence within the organization than in the past. 78

Perón's fall transformed the politics of the country's capitalist classes in other ways. Between 1952 and 1955, although businesses from the interior were the overwhelming majority in the CGE, most of the country's leading companies and principal capitalists had eventually drifted over to it, realizing that Perón was prepared to deal with business only as a corporate entity and that the price of continued intransigence would be high. But after Perón's fall, the majority of the Buenos Aires businesses returned to the resurrected UIA as well as the Sociedad Rural and Bolsa de Comercio. The CGE might have been eclipsed altogether; it managed to survive thanks once again to the organizational efforts of businessmen from the northeast and northwest. In 1956 the Federación Económica de Tucumán organized the fourth Congreso Económico del Norte Argentino with the attending delegations from Tucumán, Catamarca, Chaco, Jujuy, Formosa, La Rioja, and Santiago del Estero all protesting the re-establishment of the dominance of Buenos Aires economic interests. A second congress held in Tucumán in July 1957 would elaborate more fully the nationalist positions of the CGE. The CGE outlived the fall of Perón and his failed attempt to establish a corporatist role for business, precisely because the organization continued to take the part of economic

and social groups that did not feel represented by the Buenos Aires-dominated UIA.

As mentioned, one of the most notable developments in the post-1955 history of the CGE was the growing influence of its industrial wing, the Confederación de Industria (CI). Whereas the CGE had been organized and led during its formative years from 1952 to 1955 largely by merchants from the northwest provinces, the metalworking industrialists were destined to be new powers in the organization after Frondizi restored its legal status in 1958, although small commercial and agrarian interests remained influential and sometimes in conflict with the organization's industrial wing.⁷⁹ But the CGE's industrialists now carried great weight and influenced much of its activities. For example, at the metalworking industrialists' insistence, throughout the 1960s the CGE supported the activities of the CIFARA (Cámara Industrial de Fabricantes de Automotores, Repuestos y Afines) to deal with the growing crisis

in the auto parts sector, and it unfailingly sent CGE delegations to all CIFARA-sponsored events. Industrialists also influenced the CGE's opposition to the economic policies of virtually every government until the 1973 Peronist restoration. For example, despite the CGE's initial support for Frondizi's program of industrialization with a vigorous state role in planning and regulation, the organization soon came into conflict with the practical implications of the *desarrollista* program. It was on the basis of the demand for economic federalism and protection of national industry that the CGE would question an initial attraction to Frondizi's and the *desarrollistas'* plan for an industrial strategy based on multinational investment.⁸⁰ The CGE especially objected to Frondizi's stabilization plans, his austerity agreement with the IMF, and the failure to support small business, and it eventually proposed an alliance with the country's trade unions to oppose the *desarrollista* program.⁸¹

In the years following Perón's overthrow, the CGE developed its own unique ideology, free now from the countervailing pressures of the state but more open to those of Argentine society at large. Its very language changed, and it spoke no longer of the *fuerzas vivas* but rather of the *empresariado nacional*. In a country in which capitalism's legitimacy was said to be unassailable, the CGE championed "national businessmen" as the real agents of economic independence and social reform.⁸² From its relegalization in 1958 until its disbanding by the military government in 1976, the CGE was a whirlwind of activities and easily the most dynamic businessmen's organization in the country. It promoted a variety of undertakings: training courses for its members, lectures by Argentine and foreign economists and technical experts, and

numerous conferences. The CGE was most active at the provincial level, sponsoring conferences on such issues as rural electrification, the crisis in cotton production, and the effects of national economic policy on the auto parts industry.

Thus, unlike Brazil, in Argentina it was not the organization representing big capital that was the dynamic promoter of industrialization and effective state intervention in the economy (the case of the São Paulo-based FIESP) but the small provincial businessmen represented in the CGE. This was due to both the conservatism and strength of the traditional export-financial interests represented in the Unión Industrial Argentina, Bolsa de Comercio, and Sociedad Rural, and also the historic domination of the national economy by Buenos Aires characteristics of Argentina that

allowed the causes of industrial reform and federalism to merge. To cite just one example, the CGE supported its own research institute to study problems of national economic development, the Instituto de Investigaciones y Financieras de la CGE. This was an institute that had on its staff some of the best economists and social scientists in the country, without a counterpart among the big capitalist groups represented in the Unión Industrial, the Bolsa de Comercio, and the Sociedad Rural, but comparable to the FIESP's endeavors along these lines.⁸³ The purpose of the Instituto was to study all facets of the national economy. This meant not only compiling information of use to its members but also allowing the CGE to make an intellectually and empirically elaborated contribution to the debate on national economic policy.⁸⁴

There were a number of reasons for the enthusiastic participation of small businessmen in the CGE's undertakings, and many of them speak to what was the real significance of Peronism and its transforming effects on the country's political culture. Peronism perhaps was most revolutionary in the changes it occasioned in creating a new political space, changes in the self-perceptions and the opportunities it made available for participation in politics among previously excluded or marginalized groups. In the case of the small businessmen of the CGE, the organization was an outlet for political activity for people who had neither the time nor the inclination for a heavy involvement in party work. Also, in a country in which political connections were essential to conducting business a characteristic that had become only more pronounced under Perón participation in the CGE gave its members access to government ministries and allowed them to lobby effectively on issues of taxation, industrial promotion, state contracts, and all

kinds of preferential treatment for their business interests. The CGE's papers record frequent visits from provincial governors, congressmen and senators, and representatives of other politically powerful institutions such as the military; having access to those with influence and power was certainly an attractive enticement for membership. The secret history of business deals, sweetheart contracts, kickbacks, and bribes is certainly a part of this story. But self-interest alone does not adequately explain the CGE's history. In the course of these businessmen's participation in the organization, a sense of mission developed, a sense that Gelbard himself played a great part in instilling, so that the CGE's ideology became a driving force in the lives of many of its members. This sense of mission could be summarized as a belief in the liberating role of the country's small busi-

nessmen, the *bolicheros*, and the cause of economic federalism and economic nationalism that would allow small capitalists to spearhead the country's liberation in the crusade to create a popular capitalism.

The CGE remained outspoken in its support for cooperation with the trade unions. This did not represent an outright alliance with Peronism because, at least until the emergence of radical, anticapitalist currents within organized labor at the end of the 1960s, the CGE expressed the belief that business should cooperate not just with the Peronist unions but with all tendencies within the labor movement. But as time went on, the nationalist positions of the majority of the Peronist unions, as opposed to the anticapitalist stance of rival leftist unions, appeared the only acceptable attitudes coming from the ranks of labor. In 1962 the CGE and CGT worked out an agreement and common platform, supporting an improvement in the standard of living for the working class, expanding the domestic market, and strengthening "national business." Like the CGT, the CGE supported state intervention to strengthen national industry, the *empresa privada y nacional* so often extolled in Peronist discourse, with business and labor given a direct advisory role.⁸⁵ Within the CGE, the Confederación de Industria denied any corporatist sympathies and claimed that the Consejo Económico Social would merely formulate policy suggestions and certainly had no aspirations to replace the country's political parties or representative institutions. Nevertheless, its message with regard to both labor and an advisory role for business was somewhat contradictory. Though it supported a role for labor in principle, it remained adamantly opposed to any encroachment by labor on management's prerogatives in the

workplace, harped incessantly on the productivity problem, and opposed generally as much as the UIA did the regime's policies on generous severance pay for dismissed workers, as well as its Peronist labor legislation. Labor mobilizations organized by the CGT such as the 1963 *Semana de protesta* and the 1964 *Plan de lucha* invariably were criticized.⁸⁶ Similarly, though it claimed to support representative democracy, it spoke more often of the need to overcome the chronic factionalism in Argentine politics and to establish effective state planning; its message was tinged with quasi-corporatist ideas.⁸⁷

The assumption of power by the military and the establishment of the dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía in 1966 ushered in a new period in the CGE's history. The CGE opposed the "Argentine Revolution" on nationalist and federalist grounds. It

harshly criticized the "denationalization" of Argentine banks and industries and demanded governmental protection for "national industry" and a closer regulation of the financial sector, with sufficient credit available for the country's small businessmen.⁸⁸ The CGE also became a forum for provincial opposition to Onganía, protesting among other things the government's intervention of the Federación Económica de Tucumán, the closing of Salta's tobacco businessmen's association, and the "denationalization" of Mendoza's wine industry.⁸⁹ In 1968, representatives from the CGE met in Córdoba and issued the so-called Declaración de Córdoba, the first major criticism of the government's economic program from the business community. The CGE later took the position that the economic growth experienced by the country during the first three years of Onganía's government had benefited only Buenos Aires and the littoral provinces, that the rest of the country had languished.⁹⁰ Its provincial roots were revealed in the fact that it was virtually the only organization of national standing in the country to offer a balanced assessment of the great 1969 urban protest, the Cordobazo. The CGE emphasized its social and regional underpinnings rather than interpreting it, as the government and big business did, as simply the work of leftist subversives.⁹¹

In the course of the Onganía dictatorship, the CGE's ideology became more radicalized, as did that of many social actors in Argentina. Especially in the final years of the regime, in the midst of a great popular effervescence and radicalization of the country's political culture, CGE members began to talk, publicly and in its internal debates, of the need for an economic program that would be *nacional y popular*. The CGE also attempted to identify itself

fully with the movement for the restoration of democratic rule, overcoming suspicions that its corporatist past and inclinations had created. The CGE publicly sought to remain nonpartisan, and in early 1973, in response to the appearance of CGE members on various party tickets, the organization passed a statute requiring any member running for public office to request a leave of absence and any member elected to office to resign any executive position held in the CGE.⁹² But neutrality proved impossible, and the inexorable pull of Peronism, both because of the CGE's previous ideological trajectory and the attraction of allying with the country's principal political force, drew it toward the Peronist movement. The CGE accepted a May 1972 invitation from the Peronist Party to attend a conference to discuss constitutional reform and upcoming elections.⁹³ Contacts between the CGE and the CGT became more fre-

quent, and the basic points of the *Pacto Social* were negotiated between them months before the restored Peronist government ever adopted it in 1973. The CGE and CGT formed a joint committee to study the country's economic problems and offer common solutions, and in September 1972 they jointly published a document which CGE-CGT delegations delivered to various provincial governments. 94

Although generally regarded as a Peronist organization, the CGE had attempted throughout the 1960s to keep good relations with all those political parties that adhered to nationalist or quasinationalist positions, as well as nationalist factions within the armed forces. The Christian Democrats, the Union Cívica Radical Intransigente, the Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo, and the neo-Peronist parties were all invited to CGE gatherings. What pushed the CGE closer to Peronism than to the other parties was above all the CGE's cold reading of the political realities. Gelbard in particular had a sharp political sense and, with trips to Madrid, he rekindled his close personal relationship with Perón in the hope of giving the CGE the long-awaited opportunity to put its economic program into practice. For himself, he also hoped to advance his own business concerns. The Gelbard of the early 1970s was a very different figure from the traveling salesman from Catamarca of the 1940s. His private ventures were considerable, he had managed to build a business empire of his own, and by the 1970s he was a part of a powerful industrial group. His connections to the state had benefited his business concerns in the past and they were essential to his future business interests thus the intense courting of Perón in these years. But, as in the 1950s, Gelbard and the CGE also made a

concerted effort to avoid too close an entanglement with Perón and the Peronists once they were in a position of influence.

Shortly after his acceptance of a cabinet post as minister of economy in the new Peronist government, Gelbard stressed privately that he and other CGE members who had accepted government positions had a "moral obligation" to remain faithful to the CGE's program above and beyond any loyalty to the government, that the CGE's coming to power in the form of a "businessmen's organization" (*nucleamiento empresarial*) rather than as part of a political party meant that the risk of power tempting its members and therefore corrupting the CGE's program was real, and that steps therefore had to be taken to prevent such an outcome. The CGE took on something of the character of a secret religious or political society after the Peronist restoration, with its members swearing to

remain loyal to its principles and with a motion presented by Gelbard himself and accepted by the CGE's executive committee that any CGE member who accepted a government position was ultimately accountable to the CGE, not the government, and would have to resign his government position upon the decision of the CGE.⁹⁵ This did not represent a parochial loyalty but a belief on the part of Gelbard and others that the country was in desperate need of structural change that the CGE's program represented the "peaceful option" for undertaking the profound transformation of the country's economic, social, and political structures. There was also an urgency about adopting the CGE's plans, a fear on the part of its members that the failure to undertake meaningful reform would lead to a leftist revolution, and a belief that the right was thoroughly discredited after seven years of military rule while the revolutionary, anticapitalist left's star was on the rise.⁹⁶ What was needed therefore was a revolution made by the national bourgeoisie either that or face the establishment of a socialist state.⁹⁷

The return of Peronism to power in 1973 gave the CGE the opportunity to put into practice all the ideas and programs it been advocating for more than twenty years. For the first year and a half of the 1973-1976 Peronist government, the economic program implemented was essentially that of the CGE, and Gelbard, now minister of economy, was its executor.⁹⁸ Perón had come to believe, in no small part because of Gelbard's powers of persuasion, that the CGE's plan would lay the basis for national reconstruction and conciliation, with business and labor united in a common cause. He therefore ordered Héctor Cámpora to appoint Gelbard the new Peronist government's minister of economy and

retained the former CGE president as his minister when he succeeded Cámpora in the presidency in September 1973. In addition to Gelbard, there were many other CGE members in the various ministries. CGE members sat on the government's price and wage control committee (Comisión de Precios, Ingresos y Nivel de Vida) and on the strategic national grain and meat boards (the Junta Nacional de Granos and Junta Nacional de Carne), and the CGE was given the special task by the Social Welfare Ministry of forming a committee to study plans for a national unemployment insurance, which it alone among the country's capitalist groups had been calling for.⁹⁹ Outside the government, the CGE served as a kind of shadow advisor to Gelbard and propagandist for the *Plan Gelbard*. In late 1973, for example, it began to sponsor a weekly television series, "El País: Un Gran Compromiso Nacional," featuring members of the CGE executive

committee and a "popular panel" composed of businessmen, workers, students, journalists, homemakers, and others who were to discuss and debate various facets of the government's economic program. 100

With the Economics Ministry in its hands and with its highly visible presence inside and outside the government, the CGE reinforced its image as a Peronist organization; and indeed there was a considerable degree of ideological compatibility between Peronist popular nationalism and the CGE's guiding philosophy. But Gelbard's and the CGE's program also represented something that had been developing in the country over two and a half decades free from Peronist tutelage: a mobilization of small businessmen behind the banners of economic nationalism and federalism. That program called for effective state regulation of foreign capital and for restricting the access of foreign multinationals to local credit and limiting their profit remittances to 14 percent of their gross profits. Gelbard proclaimed that the new government would henceforth grant foreign investment rights on an individual basis (in some cases by industry, in others by company) and that it would prohibit foreign investment altogether in sectors of the economy vital to national security such as banking, oil, and public utilities.¹⁰¹ Other facets of the program included protectionism for "national" industry, credits and low interest loans for small business, tax reform, a plan to promote regional economic development, an agrarian reform law, and state control of foreign trade all long-standing proposals by the CGE.¹⁰²

Gelbard did not, as many of his detractors have contended, wish simply to return to distributive economics and priming the pump

through increased domestic demand. The *Plan Gelbard* was a serious multifaceted attempt to attack the monopolistic structure and practices of Argentine capitalism and to break with the country's reliance on multinational capital without returning to inflationary policies. It therefore represented a sharp break with the economic programs followed by nearly all the country's governments between 1955 and 1973. Gelbard worked out an ambitious three-year plan (the *Plan Trienal*) to coordinate his and the CGE's program for regional development. To finance the plan, Gelbard aggressively promoted international trade, opening up commercial relations with Cuba, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and other socialist-bloc countries.¹⁰³ Gelbard and the CGE envisioned their popular capitalism as the realistic revolutionary option, not only for Argentina but also for all of Latin America, and they sent delegations to Mexico,

Venezuela, and other Latin American countries to meet with small businessmen's organizations in those countries to preach the message. 104

The cornerstone of the program was a wage and price control plan, the *Pacto Social*.¹⁰⁵ Business and labor were to harmonize their interests through representation on a council to advise the government on economic policy and thereby eliminate inflation through dialogue and compromise. The first step in the process was a mutually binding wage and price freeze. For the first several months of Gelbard's ministry the CGT and the CGE were in constant communication, and the *Pacto Social* was a qualified success. Nevertheless, Gelbard and the CGE seriously overestimated the unity within the ranks of both labor and business on such a program. The anticapitalist, anti-bureaucratic *clasista* currents at work in the trade unions and the general explosion of militancy in the workplace throughout the country were serious enough threats to the *Pacto Social*. But business itself was hardly united behind the program. In the first months following Gelbard's appointment, there had been a rush from businessmen's organizations to join the CGE. The country witnessed the somewhat unseemly spectacle of businessmen's organizations, notably from Buenos Aires, that had never been active in the CGE and in some cases had even been openly hostile to it suddenly petitioning to join.¹⁰⁶ But this did not represent any support for the government or commitment by them to the *Plan Gelbard*'s success; it was merely an attempt to avoid remaining outside the networks of power and influence. Moreover, the country's leading economic groups, especially the landed elite organized in the Sociedad Rural,

resolutely opposed Gelbard and argued for minimal state intervention in the economy.

On the other hand, there were some grounds for optimism. One reason for believing the plan could have some success was that the CGE's historic adversary, the UIA, was now an ally. The historic rift between the UIA and the CGE had started to heal in the 1960s as the country's industrialists began to agree on the need for a certain degree of state intervention to protect industry. The UIA, intervened by Perón in 1946 and abolished outright in 1953, had been reestablished in 1956. Given the *desarrollistas*' desires for a modern capitalist sector, and thus supportive of a high degree of concentration of economic power, Frondizi had encouraged the fusion of the traditionally dominant economic interests in the Sociedad Rural, the UIA, and the Bolsa de Comercio. In 1958 they formed a separate organization, the Acción para la Coordinación de Institu-

ciones Empresariales Libres (ACIEL), which embraced a radical free trade program.¹⁰⁷ Nearly a decade later, the biggest industries, mainly multinationals, withdrew from the UIA, forming the Consejo Empresario Argentino (CEA) in 1967 in alliance with the ACIEL, thereby changing the complexion of the UIA and making it more susceptible to pressures from its small and medium-size industrial members.¹⁰⁸ As the UIA became more of an organization for small and middle-size industrialists, though still with its base in Buenos Aires, the points of agreement with the CGE increased.¹⁰⁹ The ACIEL feared such an alliance and tried on several occasions to defuse its potential by working through the Federación Económica de Buenos Aires (FEB), the small businessmen's organization from the capital city represented in the CGE, to get control of the CGE. Its attempts were all frustrated by a vigilant CGE executive committee.¹¹⁰ In August 1974, under heavy pressure from now Minister of Economy Gelbard, the UIA fused with the CI to form the Confederación Industrial Argentina (CINA), but, the greater points of agreement notwithstanding, the alliance was probably largely one of convenience, the result too of the UIA industrialists' belief that they needed to be working on the inside.

The threat that Gelbard's program represented to the dominant economic interests of the country was simply too great for maintenance of any semblance of unity among the country's capitalist classes and, following a brief period of formal support, the leading capitalist groups launched an offensive against Gelbard and the CGE. After a failed attempt by Gelbard to fuse ACIEL with the CGE (apparently hoping thereby to take control of the former), the big businesses represented in the ACIEL launched a

bitter press and defamation campaign against the CGE, especially questioning the integrity of its nationalist positions. The most serious attack, and the one that did the greatest damage to Gelbard, was the revival of old accusations that Gelbard and other CGE members had set up a sweetheart contract for themselves to supply the country's publicly owned aluminum plant in the Patagonia, accusations that only months before had led to the CGE's threatening the ACIEL with a lawsuit for slander.¹¹¹

But an even greater problem was that the "national bourgeoisie," though perhaps united ideologically behind the *Plan Gelbard*, was too diverse a group to reconcile its individual interests once the practical implications of the economic program became clear, a fact that reveals the inherent political weakness of this sector of the country's capitalist classes and the limits of the Peronist

populist alliance. For example, the small farmers who belonged to the CGE-affiliated Federación Agraria Argentina supported Gelbard's plans to establish a tax on underutilized land and an agrarian reform law, but not the attempt to keep agricultural prices low for the government's working-class supporters in the form of the *Pacto Social*; the latter ultimately proved a more important priority than the former. The small landowners grouped in the Federación Agraria Argentina who had been the mainstays of the CGE for a number of years broke with the organization, as did the founders of the CGE, the northwest businessmen grouped in the Movimiento Empresario del Interior (MEDI), who were also opposed to a price freeze on sugar.¹¹² The UIA also criticized many aspects of Gelbard's and the CGE's economic program from the very start (such as price controls) and withdrew from the CINA after Perón's death and in the midst of a deteriorating economic and political situation. The *Plan Gelbard* outlived Perón's death by only a few months. In October 1974, Gelbard was forced to resign, and Alfredo Gómez Morales, Perón's minister of economy in his first presidency, was named by Isabel Perón as Gelbard's successor. Gómez Morales and his successors followed a conservative austerity program for the next year and a half. Following the 1976 coup, all organizations belonging to the CGE were intervened. A year later, the CGE itself was abolished and Gelbard died in exile.

Conclusion

The history of the CGE and that of the relationship of business to Peronism generally call into question certain common interpretations of the role played by capitalist classes in the Peronist populist alliance. It is true that the country's leading

businessmen's associations were deeply suspicious of Perón during the 1943-46 military governments and that the UIA ultimately cast its lot with the opposition, but not after great internal debate and the emergence of a faction willing to cooperate with Perón and the Peronist state. Cooperation with the new regime naturally did not necessarily mean an acceptance of Justicialist doctrine or support for Perón, but neither did it mean entrenched opposition. Moreover, for most of the *peronato* there was a working relationship if not outright alliance between a major part of the country's capitalist classes and the state. The entire debate on the role of business in Peronism is in dire need of some analytical sharpness. The country's business groups were extremely diverse. The retail store owner in La Rioja or small

farmer in Santa Fe or struggling industrialist in Córdoba had little in common with the members of the Sociedad Rural, the Bolsa de Comercio, or even the UIA itself. The small businessmen of the provinces, including, it should be emphasized, many from Buenos Aires province and the federal district, provided Perón with his most important support among the country's capitalist groups. Nor was this support, as with the first businessmen's associations established under Perón, largely opportunistic. The country's small businessmen deeply identified with many elements of Peronist policies and ideology.

The history of the relationship between the country's capitalist classes and the Peronist state also gives credence to Menem's claim that Peronism has always been a movement deeply concerned with establishing a climate conducive to business. Menem has chosen a model apparently very different from Perón's, but in reality with a fine Peronist pedigree. It should also be remembered that Perón signed contracts with Standard Oil and Kaiser, among others, in his second administration, and that his reliance on the small businessmen of the provinces was due principally to the hostility of many of the country's leading businessmen as well as his inability to forge effective institutional support among the country's leading capitalist groups, who barely established a working and provisional relationship with his government. It is in its success in attracting the support of the country's dominant capitalist groups and adoption of policies inimical to the interests of the Peronist *bolicheros* of the past that *menemismo* represents a significant departure from traditional Peronism. Menem is not relying on the country's small businessmen but rather, in terms of his support among capitalist groups, on the *grupos económicos*, the private

conglomerates that emerged largely as a result of the 1976-1983 military governments' economic program and dominate the country's economy today, and on the international financial and business communities. Their support is understandable. They are the ones who have been the principal beneficiaries of his privatization programs.

The history of the role of business within Peronism prior to Menem reveals the truly novel character of *menemismo*, but it may also suggest its limits, as the country's small businessmen, never completely absorbed into Peronism, cannot be manipulated with the same ease as the trade union movement. They may ultimately prove to be one of the more effective opponents to the *menemista* project. That would be the final irony of Menem's reified Peronism, if this Peronist president from the provinces whose political

support has resided in great measure on the small capitalist classes of La Rioja the very sorts of people who historically made up CGE were ultimately brought down by the same people. The economic and social conditions that brought them and the CGE to a prominent place in recent Argentine history certainly have not been resolved. The historic rift between Buenos Aires and the provinces has only widened under Menem. The small farmer from Tucumán, the struggling metallurgical industrialist from Córdoba, or the retail store owner from Chaco may yet be heard from again before the *menemista* project is realized.

Notes

1. Among the many scholars who subscribe to this argument is Carlos Waisman, whose *Reversal of Development in Argentina: Postwar Counterrevolutionary Policies and Their Structural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) is one of the more recent and persuasive examples of this line of reasoning. These ideas were also at the heart of Guillermo O'Donnell's "bureaucratic-authoritarian" model, in which O'Donnell argued that the "national bourgeoisie" and the role it played in the Peronist populist alliance were key components in the country's political instability between 1955 and 1976. For a concise statement of O'Donnell's thesis, see "State and Alliances in Argentina, 1956-76," *Journal of Development Studies* 15, no. 1 (October 1978): 3-33.

2. Nearly all the studies on the role of business in national politics have been undertaken by sociologists and political scientists and have concentrated almost exclusively on the role of industrialists. These are the principal studies: Pablo Castel, *Empresariado*

nacional y cambios sociales (Buenos Aires: Editorial Anteo, 1985); Dardo Cúneo, *Comportamiento y crisis de la clase empresarial* (Buenos Aires: Pleamar, 1967); John William Freels, *El sector industrial en la política nacional* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1970); Jorge Niosi, *Los empresarios y el Estado argentino, 1955-1969* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1974); Guillermo O'Donnell, *Notas sobre el estudio de la burguesía local* (Buenos Aires: CEDES, 1978); Eldon Kenworthy, "Did the 'New Industrialists' Play a Significant Role in the Formation of Perón's Coalition, 1943-1946?" in *New Perspectives on Modern Argentina*, ed. Alberto Ciria (Bloomington: University of Indiana, Latin American Studies Program, 1972), pp. 15-28; Judith Teichman, "Interest Conflict and Entrepreneurial Support for Perón," *Latin American Research Review* 16, no. 1 (1981): 144-55; Scott Mainwaring, "The State and the Industrial Bourgeoisie in Perón's Argentina, 1945-1955," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 3-31; Joel Horowitz, "Industrialists and the Rise of Perón, 1943-1946: Some Implications for the Conceptualization of Populism," *Americas* 47, no. 2 (October 1990): 199-217; Paul Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 145-210, 329-61; Cristina Lucchini, *Apoyo empresarial en los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1990); and Jorge Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado: La Unión Industrial Argentina* (Buenos Aires: CISEA/Imago Mundi, 1991).

3. Torcuato Di Tella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," in *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, ed. Claudio Véliz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).
4. Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudio sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971).
5. Dardo Cúneo, *Comportamiento y crisis de la clase empresaria* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1967), pp. 174-75.
6. See Kenworthy, pp. 21-22; and Horowitz, p. 210. For the embassy's reading on the frostiness of the industrialists for Perón, see especially U.S. Department of State, Papers Related to the Internal Affairs of Argentina, U.S. Embassy Buenos Aires, "Tendency Towards State-Directed Economy in Argentina," 835.50/5-2645, May 24, 1945; and "Manifesto of Industrial and Commercial Associations to the Argentine Government," 835.50/6-2045, June 20, 1945.
7. Horowitz and Kenworthy do make this distinction. However, they and others who question the importance of industrialists in the original Peronist coalition all put too much weight, in my estimation, on the 1945-46 juncture, a very special moment politically. Moreover, there were unquestionably industrialists who had serious doubts whether the Unión Democrática ticket would be as accommodating to industrial interests as the 1943-46 military governments had been, and as they expected Perón to be. As Kenworthy himself notes, industrialists such as Miguel Miranda, president of the Banco Industrial since late 1945, and Rolando Lagomarsino, named by Perón as secretary of Industry and Commerce after the 1946 elections (to name just two) cannot be

said to have been in opposition to Perón. This is not to say that industrialists as a class were rallying behind Perón in 1945-46. They clearly were not. Rather, industrialists in 1945-46 were divided on how best to protect their interests. Some supported Perón, more preferred to remain neutral, and a majority sided with the anti-Perón forces. That does not close the issue, however, and the special political circumstances in the country make the UIA's opposition to Perón of doubtful use in trying to understand industrialists' participation in the Peronist coalition or in understanding class alliances in populism in general. In terms of the original Peronist coalition, both sides are partly right. Di Tella and Murmis-Portantiero and more recently Lucchini were right to note the significance of the presence of industrialists such as Miranda and Largomarsino. Di Tella did put too much emphasis on the idea of rupture and the role of a new industrial bourgeoisie (his "anti-status quo elite") in the origins of Peronism, although there is something to the idea, especially as regards the metalworking industries, during the Peronist governments themselves. However, as a simple statement of fact about the relative weakness of industrialists' support for Perón during 1945-46, I agree with the criticism by Cúneo, Kenworthy, Horowitz, and others of the "anti-status quo elite" thesis.

8. Pablo Gerchunoff, "Peronist Economic Policies, 1946-1955," in *The Political Economy of Argentina, 1946-1983*, ed. Guido Di Tella and Roger Doornbusch (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 66-67. To give just one example, the loans from the Banco Industrial (created by the military government in late 1944) increased enormously between 1945 and 1955. In 1945, the Banco Industrial granted 4,268 loans worth a total of 276.8 billion pesos. In 1955, it granted 67,407 loans worth a total of 4,869.2 trillion pesos. See the *Memoria y Balances*, Banco de Crédito Industrial, 1945-55.

9. For an excellent and pioneering study of Peronist economic policies see José C. Villarruel, "El estado, las clases sociales y la política de ingresos en los gobiernos peronistas, 1946-1955," in *Economía y historia. Contribuciones a la*

historia económica argentina, ed. Mario Rapoport (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tesis, 1988), pp. 396-97.

10. Jorge Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado: La Unión Industrial Argentina* (Buenos Aires: CISEA/Imago Mundi, 1991), pp. 29, 74-78; Ricardo Sidicaro, "Poder y crisis de la gran burguesía agraria argentina," in *Argentina, hoy*, ed. Alain Rouquié (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1982), p. 71. On the early history of the UIA, see Eugene G. Sharkley, "Unión Industrial Argentina, 1887-1920: Problems of Industrial Development," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1978.

11. Graciela Swiderski, "La UIA ¿Sustitución de importaciones o mercado externo?" in *Argentina en la paz de dos guerras, 1914-1945*, ed. Waldo Ansaldi, Alfredo Pucciarelli, and José C. Villarruel (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1993), p. 244.

12. *Revista de la Unión Industrial Argentina* 57, no. 908 (August 1944): 3-9; *ibid.* 57, no. 909 (September 1944): 16-17; *ibid.* 57, no. 910 (October 1944): 3-4; *ibid.* 58, no. 922 (October 1945): 72-73. See also Cristina Lucchini, *Apoyo empresarial en los orígenes del peronismo*, pp. 60-68. As Lucchini notes, the UIA had also enthusiastically supported the August 1944 creation of the Consejo Nacional de Posguerra, with Perón named its first president, established explicitly to avoid severe economic dislocations upon termination of the war with a special concern for industry.

13. Until this point, the UIA had more praise than criticism for Perón's labor policies. In late 1944, for example, it was still lauding Perón actions: "By establishing collective bargaining agreements between industrialists and the workers, the dangerous, professional agitators of the past are eliminated, placing in their stead the

friendly collaboration between industrialists and the authentic workers," *Revista de la Unión Industrial Argentina* 57, no. 910 (October 1944): 19.

14. Ibid. 57, no. 913 (January 1945): 42-43.

15. Ibid. 59, no. 925 (January 1946): 3-19.

16. On this point see Lucchini, *Apoyo empresarial en los orígenes del peronismo*, pp. 24-33, 60-61.

17. Miranda and Lagomarsino, industrialists who wished to see the UIA play a more vigorous role in industrial development and who would occupy important positions in Perón's government, were representative of the pro-Perón faction of the UIA. Miranda was an enthusiastic advocate of a partnership between industrialists and the state to deepen the process of industrialization in the country. One of his first initiatives as president of the Banco Industrial was a national survey to find out the specific needs of the country's industrialists in order to carry out industrial planning under the military government more effectively. See *Revista de la Unión Industrial Argentina* 59, no. 925 (January 1946): 86-87.

Lagomarsino was a textile industrialist who on numerous occasions expressed fear of a return to a liberal economy at the war's end. They were opposed by more traditional members such as UIA president Luis Colombo and the country's most successful industrialist, Torcuato Di Tella, although both Colombo and Di Tella had initially sought to maintain good relations between the UIA and the military government established in June 1943. Indeed, industrialists such as Colombo and Di Tella had nothing but praise for the pro-industrialization measures of the military government, such as the 1944 decree "Fomento y Defensa de la Industria Nacional" that established antidumping laws and generally protected domestic industry. See *Revista de la Unión Industrial*

Argentina 57, no. 907 (July 1944): 21-23. It should also be remembered that many of the industrial paladins of democracy and liberalism during 1945-46 had been outspoken in their praise of Mussolini's fascist Italy, and Colombo in particular had supported the 1943

coup d'état precisely because of the Fascist-inspired reforms it promised to undertake. Indeed, after Perón's 1946 electoral victory, he jumped sides and supported the pro-Perón Miranda-Lagomarsino faction in the April 1946 UIA elections. On the split in the UIA's ranks over Peronization see the memoir of J. Rodríguez Goicoa, then a member of the UIA executive committee, *El caso del cheque y el problema creado a los industriales argentinos: Lapso histórico, 1943-1952* (Buenos Aires: Palntíe, 1952). See also Pablo Castel, *Empresariado nacional y cambios sociales*, pp. 58-60; Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, pp. 155-57; and Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado*, pp. 94-98.

18. Cúneo, *Comportamiento*, pp. 151-54.

19. *Revista de la Unión Industrial Argentina* 59, no. 927 (March 1946): 69-71; *ibid.* 59, no. 930 (June 1946): 9.

20. See the letter from the Swift Company to the State Department, U.S. Department of State, Papers Related to the Internal Affairs of Argentina, Letter from Joseph O. Hanson, president of Swift International Company, Ltd., to Paul C. Daniels, director of the Office of American Republic Affairs, 835.5034/12-1348, December 13, 1948. For the flour milling industry see Scott Mainwaring, "The State and the Industrial Bourgeoisie in Perón's Argentina, 1945-1955," pp. 5-8, pp. 14-16.

21. Judith Teichman, "Interest Conflict and Entrepreneurial Support for Perón," *Latin American Research Review* 16, no. 1 (1981): 148-49.

22. Teichman "Interest Conflict," p. 149; Mainwaring, "The State

and the Industrial Bourgeoisie," pp. 8-9.

23. *Metalúrgia* no. 128 (April 1951): 3, 5-6; *ibid.* no. 130 (June 1951): 13.

24. *Ibid.* no. 137 (January-February 1952): 5-12; *ibid.* no. 147 (December 1952): 3; *ibid.* no. 148 (January-February 1953): 3; *ibid.* no. 151 (May 1953): 3. I am currently working on a larger study of business and Peronist economic policies, based partly on the Secretaría de Asuntos Técnicos, the papers of the second five-year plan recently acquired by the Archivo General de la Nación. My conclusions are still tentative, but there certainly appears to be embedded in the voluminous correspondence of industrialists seeking patents, credits, and state contracts from the government some kind of ideological identification with Peronism, Peronist economic planning, and the political space Perón's economic policies opened up, giving groups like the industrialists a chance to participate in a redefined public life, best represented in the five-year plans themselves.

25. *Ibid.* no. 136 (December 1951): 3, 23.

26. *Ibid.* no. 86 (June 1947): 3-4.

27. *Ibid.* no. 87 (July 1947): 3-4, 10-11; *ibid.* no. 89 (September 1947): 3-4; *ibid.* no. 101 (October 1948): 23.

28. *Ibid.* no. 110 (August 1949): 6-7.

29. *Ibid.* no. 113 (November 1949): 3.

30. *Ibid.* no. 145 (October 1952): 3, 33-36.

31. *Ibid.* no. 161, (April 1954): 13-15; *ibid.* no. 162 (May-June 1954): 3-4; *ibid.* no. 167 (November 1954): 3; *ibid.* no. 172 (May 1955): 16.

32. Ibid. no. 126 (January-February 1951): 17; *ibid.* no. 127 (March 1951): 3, 7; *ibid.* no. 159 (January-February 1954): 6; *ibid.* no. 167 (November 1954): 7-8; *ibid.* no. 171 (April 1955): 26.
33. Ibid. no. 145 (October 1952): 3, 33-36.
34. Ibid. no. 152 (June 1953): 7-8; *ibid.* no. 153 (July 1953): 3.
35. Ibid. no. 176 (September 1955): 3.
36. See "Hacia un sistema gremial confederativo," *AAPIC Boletín Semanal* no. 2 (May 29, 1948): 1.

37. "Manifiesto a las fuerzas económicas del país," *Boletín de AAPIC* 1, no. 1 (December 1946): 1.
38. A typical AAPIC criticism of government policy was that of the same Cámara Argentina de Industrias Metalúrgicas in response to the Labor Ministry's granting a 40 percent wage hike in the industry. See "Cámara Argentina de Industrias Metalúrgicas," *AAPIC Boletín Semanal* no. 26 (November 1948): 1.
39. Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, pp. 164-65.
40. "CEA: Actas Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, Acta no. 97, no. 2 (September 27, 1950): 87-88.
41. Ibid. no. 2 (September 1, 1949): 43.
42. "Actas de Asambleas: Asociación Argentina de Producción e Industria," ibid. Acta no. 4 (August 20, 1948): 17-19.
43. Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado*, pp. 101-2.
44. For an overview of the history of the provinces during the Depression years see Ronald H. Dolkart, "The Provinces," in *Prologue to Perón: Argentina in Depression and War, 1930-1943*, ed. Mark Falcoff and Ronald H. Dolkart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 164-95.
45. "CEA. Actas Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, Acta no. 99, no. 2 (October 1950): 95; ibid. Acta no. 102 (November 23, 1950): 115.
46. *El Chaco* 23, no. 272 (July-September 1951): 26.

47. "CEA. Actas Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, Acta no. 107, no. 2 (October 1951): 134-36.

48. CEA president Alfredo Rosso was forced to resign his post, a move that caused the CEA members to lambast the *infiltrados dentro del gremialismo patronal*. Resistance to the restructuring and the imminent loss of influence to the small businessmen of the provinces rings out in the CEA's internal debates. See *ibid.* Acta no. 111, no. 2 (November 13, 1952): 153-58.

49. Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado*, pp. 102-3, Teichman, "Interest Conflict," pp. 151-52.

50. "CGE: Libro de Actas de Comisión Directiva, 1952-53," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, Acta no. 2 (January 20, 1953): 3.

51. The CGE was, at least partly, the response of second- and third-generation immigrants to the resiliency of oligarchical structures of Argentine society. Their frustrated aspirations of social mobility and meaningful participation in the country's public life meshed with the federalist concerns of the provinces and the historic rivalry and opposition to Buenos Aires to create a unique ideology, an amalgam of nationalism and federalism, with a strong class component. To understand the history of the CGE and the presence of capitalist groups in the Peronist populist alliance, it is necessary to understand Argentina's special cultural and economic geography. Why some provinces were active members and why others barely participated at all, and the role regional economies and local business cultures play in this history, are crucial questions in the history of the relationship between business and Peronism.

52. Cúneo, *Comportamiento*, pp. 175-76. Throughout its history, the CGE's positions remained fairly consistent. It advocated an

expansionary monetary policy through the Banco Central, a government-supported and vigorous Banco Industrial, ample credit, and a healthy domestic market. It also supported a considerable degree of state intervention in the economy, although less so in regard to capital-labor relations. Above all, the CGE was outspoken in its demand for provincial-regional development programs, protective measures for "national" industry, and public investment in technological and scientific research.

53. Confederación General Económica de la República Argentina, "La crisis de la acción individual," *Boletín Informativo* no. 15 (February 18, 1954): 5.

54. Freels, *El sector industrial en la política nacional*, p. 96.

55. "CGE: Actas de Asambleas," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, no. 1, 1954-55, Acta no. 4 (August 2, 1955): 65; *ibid.* "CGE Memoria," 1954-55, p. 4.

56. Tass's correspondent in Argentina, Isidoro Gilbert, recently published his exposé of the secret history of the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) and claims that Gelbard was not only a party member but also one of the PCA's principal benefactors. See Isidoro Gilbert, *El oro de Moscú* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1994), pp. 232-52.

57. When Perón intervened the UIA in 1946, he prohibited the entry of new members into the organization. Many members left to join the AAPIC, the CEA, and finally the CGE. With stagnating, even declining, membership, the UIA's finances were badly hurt, and it was barely functioning when it was finally abolished in 1953. Perón also pressured the Sociedad Rural to join the CGE, which is why a few estancieros were found on its first executive board. The Sociedad Rural's attitude toward the CGE was, however, generally hostile.

58. The members of this first executive committee, their principal business interests, and home province or city were as follows: president, José B. Gelbard, retail, Catamarca-Santiago del Estero; first vice president, Agustín Seghezzo, lumber, Catamarca; second vice president, Francisco Murro, retail, federal capital; secretary,

José Gregorio de Elordy, estanciero, Buenos Aires; undersecretary, Héctor Tortosa, lumber, sawmill owner, Misiones; treasurer, Juan Martínez Centeno, retail, federal capital; vice treasurer, A. Oscar Blake, machinery manufacturer, La Plata. Delegates: Roberto Aragone, wholesale business, Mar del Plata; Victor Manuello, metalworking plant, Rosario; Francisco Lucena Racero, food processing industry, vineyards, Mendoza; Carlos Carlini Carranza, metalworking plant, Buenos Aires; Dr. Camilo O. Matta, lawyer, La Rioja; Roberto Mercier, landowner, Buenos Aires; Luis Pincolini, vineyards, Mendoza. Alternate Delegates: Camilo J. Matta, food processing, cotton and textiles, Chaco; Carmelo Calarco, retail, Buenos Aires; Juan Tártara, lumber, sawmill owner, Tucumán; Eduardo Azaretto, food processing, Buenos Aires; Juan Sánchez Taranzo, sugar mills, Tucumán.

59. "CGE: Actas de Asambleas," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, no. 1. 1954-55, Acta no. 4 (August 2, 1955): 80-81.

60. Pablo Castel, *Empresariado nacional y cambios sociales* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Anteo, 1985), p. 64

61. "CGE: Actas de Comisio Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1953-54, Acta no. 12 (December 17, 1953): 4-5; *ibid.* Acta no. 13 (February 1, 1954): 6-10.

62. Cúneo, *Comportamiento*, pp. 173-75; Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, p. 172.

63. Carlos Díaz Alejandro, *Essays on the Economic History of the Argentine Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 261.

64. Perón's displeasure with having to accept the CGE as the representative of business in his "organized community" becomes

all the more clear if we keep in mind the centralizing tendencies of his government. Under the second five-year plan, for example, the provinces were deprived of even more of their autonomy, with public works projects the sole responsibility of the federal government, provincial penal codes abolished, the Ministry of Education asserting direct control over curricula, books, and teaching methods, and all social

welfare activities and agencies assigned to the jurisdiction of the Eva Perón Foundation. See Jean Claude García Zamor, *Public Administration and Social Changes in Argentina: 1943-1955* (Rio de Janeiro: 1968), pp. 129-30. The CGE accepted this centralism in return for a greater share of the federal budget for the interior and a five-year plan that unquestionably had a national scope and aimed to stimulate economic development in the provinces.

65. "CGE: Libro de Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1952-53, Acta no. 11 (November 30, 1953): 31-34.

66. "CGE: Actas de Asambleas," 1954, *ibid.*, Acta no. 2 (September 2, 1954): 15-18; "La CGE analiza la situación planteada en las tratativas para renovar los convenios de trabajo," *Confederación General Económica de la República Argentina, Boletín Informativo* 1, no. 24 (April 29, 1954): 3-4; "El gobierno de la empresa," *ibid.* 1, no. 27 (May 20, 1954): 3-4; "Armonía social," *ibid.* 1, no. 28 (May 27, 1954): 3.

67. "CGE: Actas de Asambleas," 1954, *Confederación General Económica Archive*, no. 1, Acta no. 4 (August 2, 1955): 95-97; *Confederación General Económica, Memoria*, 1954-55, p. 46. In response to such criticisms, Perón allowed the CGE to assign advisers to the labor courts working out of the Labor and Social Welfare Ministry.

68. "CGE: Actas de Asambleas," 1954, *Confederación General Económica Archive*, no. 1, Acta no. 2 (Sept. 2, 1954): 34.

69. *Confederación General Económica, Memoria*, 1954-55, p. 46.

70. Biblioteca del Congreso, Colección Peronista, Ministerio de Educación, "Universidad Obrera Nacional: Reglamentos de Organización y Funcionamiento," 1953.

71. "CGE: Actas Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, no. 1, 1954, Acta no. 19 (June 28, 1954): 62-63.

72. Freels, *El sector industrial*, p. 18.

73. Confederación General Económica Archive, "Apertura del Congreso: Palabras del Sr. José B. Gelbard," CGE "Primer Congreso de Organización y Reacciones del Trabajo," *Informe* (December 1954), pp. 17-18.

74. Confederación General Económica Archive, "Posibilidad de la Racionalización en Nuestro Medio," *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 138.

75. In a speech before the Federación Argentina Metalúrgica, Gelbard denied rumors that one of the purposes of the congress was to establish comanagement between workers and management and allow for worker participation in profits, stressing that the sine qua non of increased productivity was reestablishing shop floor discipline and respect for authority within the firm. See *Metalúrgia* no. 170 (March, 1955): 53-56. On the productivity congress, see Marcos Giménez Zapiola and Carlos M. Leguizamón, "La concertación peronista de 1955: El Congreso de la Productividad," in *La formación del sindicalismo peronista*, ed. Juan Carlos Torre (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1988). For an interesting new study of the 1955 productivity congress and the CGE's role in it see Rafael Bitrán, *El congreso de la productividad: La reconversión económica durante el segundo gobierno peronista* (Buenos Aires: El Bloque, 1994). Bitrán's study is persuasive, although he draws a bit too simple a picture of the CGE as just another capitalist organization

interested in extracting as much surplus value from the workers as it could. As I hope this essay will demonstrate, the CGE's history was considerably more complicated than that, and the influence of ideology, a genuine interest its members had in reaching an equilibrium between business and labor, should not be dismissed as just a capitalist ploy.

76. Industrial psychology played an even more prominent role in the second productivity congress. Among the suggestions bantered about was the establishment of a *psicotécnico* exam by personnel departments in order to determine those workers and managers best equipped, cognitively and emotionally, to handle the challenges of work in a modern industrial enterprise, including the flexibility needed to ensure maximum productivity. See *Productividad y Bienestar Social: Organo Oficial del Congreso Nacional de Productividad y Bienestar Social* 1, no. 16 (April 25, 1955): 459-60.

77. *Productividad y Bienestar Social: Organo Oficial del Congreso Nacional de Productividad y Bienestar Social* 1, no.16 (April 25, 1955): 478, 485.

78. It would not be until much later, however, that the Cordoban metalworking industrialists would actually join the CGE. In 1970, the Entidades Empresarias de la Provincia de Córdoba, the most powerful businessmen's organization in Córdoba and one dominated by the metalworking industrialists, petitioned to join the CGE. The Cordoban industrialists would play a very influential role during Gelbard's tenure as the minister of economy from 1973 to 1974.

79. Another innovation in the post-1955 period was the growing influence of the small merchantsretailers for the most part in the federal capital grouped in the Confederación de Comercio. This particular sector of the business community, although members of the organization since its founding, had not been influential in the formative years of the CGE, but they would be in the 1960s and 1970s. These merchants had a close working relationship with the

commercial workers' union; they counted not only Peronists within their ranks but also many Radicals, Socialists, and Communists, and identified not with the federalist sentiment compelling the CGE but with the antimonopolist populism increasingly a part of the CGE's ideology.

80. Gelbard had tried to create a close relationship with Frondizi similar to what he had enjoyed with Perón, but the *desarrollistas'* economic policies were ultimately too incompatible with those of the CGE membership. See Celia Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina, 1955-1962* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp. 177-78. The CGE's refusal to support the *desarrollista* program would convert the latter into the organization's greatest adversary. The CGE found itself attacked, even more than by the ACIEL, by *frigerismo* throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and destruction of the CGE became one of *frigerismo's* principal objectives.

81. "CGE: Actas de Asambleas," 1954-1961, *Confederación General Económica Archive*, no. 1, "Acta de Reunión Extraordinaria del Consejo Superior de la CGE," (May 2, 1958): 146-51; *ibid.* "Acta de la Asamblea Annual de la CGE," (April 25, 1960): 169-70.

82. On the CGE's ideology see the two very interesting interviews with Gelbard, "La batalla empresaria," *Confirmado* 2, no. 58 (June 1966): 64-68; and "La rebelión de los empresarios," *Primera plana* 10, no. 470 (February 1972): 15-19.

83. On the FIESP see Barbara Weinstein, "The Industrialists, the State, and the Issues of Worker Training and Social Services in Brazil, 1930-1950," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (August 1990): 379-404. The contrast with the Brazilian case is very interesting. In Argentina, the Buenos Aires industrialists never

managed to establish their hegemony among the country's capitalist groups the way the São Paulo industrialists did in Brazil. Diverse factors explain this. One was certainly the greater resiliency of Argentina's traditional export economy in the 1930s and during the war, and consequently both

the survival of the country's traditional agrarian elite and the dependence of much of industry on the export sector. It was also due to the deeper roots of populism in Argentina than in Brazil. Perón, unlike Vargas, never managed to establish anything approaching a working relationship with the country's big industrialists, although he certainly tried to cultivate such a relationship. The five-year plans, the Universidad Obrera Nacional, the productivity congresses, and the various businessmen's confederations such as the AAPIC and the CEA were all attempts to build such a relationship. But Perón was hamstrung by the very nature of his movement, its more subversive content, the greater mobilization and empowerment not only of workers but also of small businessmen who challenged the country's dominant economic interests in Buenos Aires. The partnership with the state and welfare capitalism that the FIESP came to support was not embraced by the UIA or the country's big industrialists but by the CGE.

84. Confederación General Económica, "Acerca de los objetivos y funcionamiento del Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Financieras," internal report (1967).

85. Freels, *El sector industrial*, pp. 40-43, Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado*, p. 136.

86. "Libro de Actas, Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1963-64, no. 3, Acta no. 69 (May 23, 1963): 53; *ibid.* Acta no. 70 (June 6, 1963): 59; *ibid.* Acta no. 88 (May 14, 1964): 151-52; *ibid.* Acta no. 90 (June 4, 1964): 155.

87. Freels, *El sector industrial*, pp. 54-55, 88-89.

88. "Libro de Actas, Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1967, no. 5, Acta no. 139/67 (October 5, 1967): 45, 52. One of the most important concerns for small businessmen was that of credit. In Argentina's inflation-prone, high-interest economy, bank loans were the preserve of a relatively privileged few. In response to the dearth of capital, small businessmen mobilized in a nationwide cooperative movement, promoting the so-called *cajas de crédito*, savings and loans banks outside the banking system that counted among their contributors everyone from some of the country's leading provincial businessmen to the Communist Party. The *cajas de crédito* were important sources of loans for small businessmen from the late 1950s through the early 1970s. In 1967, Onganía's government attempted to establish a tighter regulatory control over them by granting jurisdiction over their activities to the Banco Central; only the determined opposition of the CGE prevented that from happening.

89. "Actas de Comisión Directiva," *ibid.*, 1968-1971, no. 6, Acta no. 172/70 (February 19, 1970): 189, 267-68. To give another example of this provincial opposition, the small businessmen in the Chaco in the Federación Económica de la Provincia del Chaco, one of the most active federations in the CGE, objected to the increasing tendency toward economic centralization under Onganía and demanded a national economic policy to move the textile industry closer to the zones of cotton production (that is, the northeast) as well as a major public works project in infrastructure in the provinces and a government in alliance with "the working class and national businessmen" to undertake meaningful reform and achieve economic independence. Archive of the Federación Económica de la Provincia del Chaco, CGE File no. 6, 1970-72, Circular, July 2, 1971.

90. "Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1968-1971, no. 6, Acta no. 159/69 (March 13, 1969): 154-59.

91. "It is obvious that the protest was not limited to the students and that other sectors of Cordoban society participated. . . . Centralization is a problem with a long history in the country which has become more pronounced in the last three years with the new kind of regime that was established. The provincial forces (*entidades*) manifested their discontent with the limited effectiveness of the provincial governments, whether because of those governments' own limitations or those imposed by the regime, which have not accomplished their economic and social objectives with the necessary vigor and effectiveness."
 "Declaración de la CGE del 5 de junio de 1969," *ibid.*, 1968-1971, no. 6, 182-84.

92. "Libro de Actas," *ibid.*, 1971-1973, no. 7, Acta no. 207/72 (January 8, 1973): 228-29.

93. "Actas de Comisión Directiva," *ibid.*, 1971-1973, no. 7, Acta no. 200/72 (June 12, 1972): 100-101.

94. "Actas de Comisión Directiva," *ibid.*, 1968-1971, no. 6, Acta no. 178/70 (July 10, 1970): 317-18; *ibid.* Acta no. 180/70 (September 10, 1970): 337; *ibid.*, 1971-73, no. 7, Acta no. 203/72 (September 11, 1972): 155-56.

95. "Libro de Actas de la Comisión Directiva," *ibid.*, 1971-1974, no. 7, Acta no. 212 (May 24, 1974): 280-84.

96. "Libro de Actas de la Comisión Directiva," *ibid.*, 1971-1974, no. 7, Acta no. 212 (May 24, 1974): 280-84. In his speech to the CGE upon being offered the ministry of economy, Gelbard said, "To the right of us there exists nothing, at most a worn out symbol that no one wants to return to. The only other possibility is what is

to the left of us; and the failure that will result from not staying true to the principles we have upheld and the movement that the CGE and its leaders have been building throughout our history could create a situation with unforeseen consequences."

97. Here again, Gelbard's words are instructive on the CGE's mood on the eve of its assumption of power: "We want to make a peaceful revolution, we want peaceful change. I say revolution because I believe that . . . we have to be revolutionary in a pacific way, the way that national businessmen (*el empresariado nacional*) have always been," "Libro de Asambleas," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1973, Asamblea General (April 23, 1973): 46-47.

98. The economic program presented by the CGE on the eve on Peronism's return to power was almost plank for plank the same as that adopted by the new government. See *Confederación General Económica*, "Sugerencias del empresariado nacional para un programa de gobierno," March, 1973.

99. "Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1971-1974, no. 7, Acta 219/73 (December 10, 1973): 416-17, 419.

100. Ibid., 1971-74, no. 7, Acta 218/1973 (November 12, 1973): 384-85. Shows were broadcasts dealing with such issues as foreign trade, wages and prices, agricultural policy, and industrial development.

101. "Política Económica y Social: Ruptura de la Dependencia," Speech of José B. Gelbard to the Governors' Conference, Buenos Aires, July 31, 1973. In order to modernize and more effectively use the public sector industries, Gelbard proposed grouping them in a single enterprise, the *Corporación de Empresas Nacionales*, an

organization that would participate as a full partner in the government's economic planning.

102. Confederación General Económica, "Sugerencias del empresariado nacional para un programa de gobierno," pp. 24-27; see also "Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, Acta no. 193/71

(October 16, 1971): 494-96, in which the CGE, at a time when a return to Peronist government looked remote, spells out its economic program, virtually the same one that Gelbard would implement in 1973 as minister of the economy.

103. On the *Plan Gelbard* see Liliana De Riz, *Retorno y derrumbe: el último gobierno peronista* (Mexico: Fólíos, 1981), pp. 83-92; and Adolfo Canitrot, "La experiencia populista de redistribución de ingresos," *Desarrollo Económico* 15, no. 59 (1975). For a highly critical and strictly technical analysis of the plan that shows little understanding of its complex social and cultural underpinnings, see Federico A. Sturzenegger, "A Description of a Populist Experience: Argentina, 1973-76," in *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America*, ed. Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 77-120.

104. "Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1971-1974, no. 7, Acta No. 223/74 (April 9, 1974): 464, 466-67. The three-year plan was, of course, in the Peronist tradition of grandiose attempts at national economic planning, often more effective as instruments of governmental propaganda than feasible and effective programs for promoting economic development. The two five-year plans from Perón's previous governments, for example, had been highly improvised, and they produced only, at best, very modest results. The first, in particular, was more a collection of individual bills presented by Perón to the congress and then passed into law than it was an integrated plan. Gelbard's three-year plan was a much more serious and integrated plan, the final realization of the CGE's positions, which had been studied and debated in the organization over the

course of two decades. Virtually no aspect of the national economy was left out: industry, technology and science, and tax policy all were included, and the reforms proposed were significant. To take just one example, agriculture: Under the supervision of the secretary of agriculture and, arguably, the country's foremost authority on agricultural issues, Horacio Gilberti, a series of laws were passed for the purpose of increasing agricultural production in the country. Among the specific reforms attempted were the suspension of all eviction proceedings against sharecroppers (*arrendatarios* and *aparceros*), the facilitation of credit to sharecroppers who had already been evicted from estates to permit the purchase of land of their own, the establishment of cooperatives in the production and marketing of agricultural commodities, the prohibition of foreign investment in agriculture unless technological improvement accompanied the investment, the nationalization of the foreign marketing of meat, the state supervision of the marketing of grains and oils, and, most important, a tax on unproductive and underutilized land. See Ricardo Sidicaro, "Poder y crisis," pp. 82-83.

105. *Opinión Económica* 4, no. 39 (June 1973): 2-3. After studying the history of the CGE in more depth and working in its archive for the past several years, I have considerably rethought a previous interpretation of the *Pacto Social* presented in my book *The Labor Wars in Córdoba, 1955-1976: Ideology, Work, and Labor Politics in an Argentine Industrial City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). My interpretation of the *Pacto Social* as simply a conservative program on the part of business and the Peronist government underestimated the importance of the *Pacto Social* as part of an overall plan of capitalist reform and missed much of its significance in the history of the CGE and of business in Peronism perhaps giving too schematic an interpretation of Peronism

and populism in the process. I still believe that the *Pacto Social* was partly, as I earlier argued, a program by a fraction of the Argentine bourgeoisie to get control of labor militancy and re-establish some degree of social peace in the coun-

try necessary to creating a healthy business climate. But I am now persuaded that it was more than that, that it was a sincere attempt to carry out a populist economic policy in accordance with the CGE's guiding philosophy. Gelbard and his economic team were genuinely concerned with upholding the workers' standard of living in a project to create what they saw as a socially just national capitalism, necessary to prevent a possible socialist revolution in the country. The business interests represented in the CGE were certainly interested in re-establishing labor peace and restoring a robust domestic market. But their concerns were not just good business. When they spoke of their opposition to an "anti-national, anti-communitarian liberalism" and their desire to establish a "humanistic" model of economic development, it was not mere fustian. For a rich distillation of the CGE's ideology and the *Plan Gelbard* in general, see Gelbard and his economic team's testimony before the Argentine congresss, Cámara de Diputados, Diario de Sesiones, vol. 1, May 30, 1974, pp. 363-409.

106. "Libro de Actas de la Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1971-1974, no. 7, Acta no. 213/73 (June 12, 1973): 295-97; *ibid.* Acta no. 214/73 (July 10, 1973): 312-13.

107. Freels, *El sector industrial*, pp. 36-45; Lewis, *The Crisis of Argentine Capitalism*, pp. 340-44.

108. Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado*, p. 134.

109. For example, the UIA renounced its former economic liberalism when it joined the CGE in the early 1970s in demanding close state regulation of foreign investment. Among the

recommendations it offered was to give preference to the investment of capital in existing "nationally owned" companies or to foment new ones that committed themselves to reinvest their profits in the country. See *Revista de la Unión Industrial Argentina* no. 47 (October-December 1970): 44.

110. "Libro de Actas de Comisión Directiva," *Confederación General Económica Archive*, 1971-1973, no. 7, Acta No. 198/72 (April 10, 1972): 81-82. The FEB was always regarded as a fifth column within the CGE and had been expelled several times from the organization, most recently in April 1973 for attending ACIEL-sponsored meetings believed to be organized to prevent the CGE economic program from being adopted by the recently elected Peronist government. Ibid., 1971-1974, no. 7, Acta No. 210/73 (April 9, 1973): 271-76.

111. Ibid. Acta no. 204/72 (October 9, 1972): 178-80.

112. Schvarzer, *Empresarios del pasado*, pp. 214-16. Even within a single province, it proved impossible to keep the diverse business interests together behind the plan. To take just one example, in Chaco province, one of the mainstays of the CGE, the businesses grouped together in the provincial federation ultimately could not reconcile their interests. The Resistencia merchants who dominated the federation were not able to curb the independent ways of the cotton and timber interests who controlled the provincial economy and who proved to be far more concerned with the *ligas agrarias* and their own sectoral interests than with the *Plan Gelbard*.

5

The Ambivalent Giant: The Peronist Labor Movement, 1945-1995*

Juan Carlos Torre

Of all the twentieth-century Latin American populist movements, Peronism stood out from the rest in its relationship with the working class and the trade union movement. The strength of the trade union institutions created by Perón and the strength of the emotional bond between the working class and Perón and ultimately Peronism gave Argentina's variant of the Latin American populist phenomenon a syndicalist character that was much weaker elsewhere in the region. Moreover, it was through Peronism that the working class found power and a voice that ultimately transformed it into one of the major players in the country's volatile political and economic life. Such had not been Perón's original intention. Perón sought to integrate the working class into the nation to ensure social peace and to strengthen the political base of the military government, which came to power in 1943, and ultimately to further his own political fortunes. The ambitious but cautious colonel envisioned no radical transformation of Argentine society. Instead, he sought an alliance between the corporate powers of the country,

*The following chapter is a synthesis of my previous writings on the Peronist labor movement. It is a summary of some of my own ideas as well as ideas drawn from the most important publications on the history of the Argentine labor movement. By way of a select

bibliography, the following works may be consulted: Jeremy Adelman, ed., *Essays in Argentine Labour History, 1870-1930* (London: Macmillan, 1992); James P. Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba: Ideology, Work and Labor Politics in an Argentine Industrial City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Hugo del Campo, *Sindicalismo y peronismo* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 1983); Torcuato Di Tella, *El sistema político argentino y la clase obrera* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1964); Louise M. Doyon, "El crecimiento sindical bajo el peronismo," "La organización del movimiento sindical peronista (1946-1955),"

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preeminently the military and the church, along with the economically dominant classes and the working class.

All this is a familiar story, and indeed one not unique to Argentina, except perhaps in its belated timing. Where the Argentine case departs from the norm and becomes something *sui generis* was in the inability of Perón to seal this corporatist pact, an inability no doubt influenced by the dramatic unfolding of international events from 1943 to 1945 that caused the military government to scuttle its Bonapartist project. Perón's own problems within the military government, the domestic pressures that mounted against him and caused his fellow officers to isolate and briefly imprison him, weakened this potential corporatist alliance at a crucial moment, strengthening the hand of organized labor within it. All this pushed Perón toward a closer relationship with the working class than he would have liked.

What was the "working class" Perón was dealing with in 1945? Succinctly, it was socially important but weak and disorganized in the economic and political arena. By the time of the 1943 coup, it was still very much a class in the making, lacking a dominant ideological predisposition. Since the 1919 *semana trágica* and the waning of anarchist trade unionism (outside of Spain, unquestionably the most powerful anarchist tradition had existed on the banks of the Rio de la Plata) the organized sector of the working class preferred to concentrate on bread and butter gains. An apolitical syndicalist current within the working class was on the rise in the 1920s, one of the reasons why the labor movement viewed with relative indifference the 1930 coup d'état and the

abrupt ending of an almost two-decade-long experiment with democracy. Syndicalism

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"Conflictos obreros durante el régimen peronista (1946-1955)," in *La formación del sindicalismo peronista*, ed. Juan Carlos Torre (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1988); Joel Horowitz, *Argentine Unions, the State and the Rise of Perón, 1930-1945* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1990); Ricardo Gaudio and Andrés Thompson, *Sindicalismo peronista, gobierno radical: Los años de Alfonsín* (Buenos Aires: Folios Ediciones, 1990); Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Walter Little, "La organización obrera y el Estado peronista (1943-1955)," in *La formación del sindicalismo peronista*, ed. Juan Carlos Torre; Juan Carlos Torre, *Los sindicatos en el gobierno, 1973-1976* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1983); Juan Carlos Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón: Sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1990); Juan Carlos Torre, ed., *El 17 de octubre de 1945* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1995); Juan Carlos Torre and Pablo Gerchunoff, "La política de liberalización económica en la administración de Menem," *Desarrollo Económico* 36, no. 143 (October-December, 1996): 733-68.

remained the dominant ideology of Argentine trade unionism in the 1930s, an ideology justified as necessary to provide a united front to capital and to avoid the political divisions of the past, but one also promoted by the most important and strategic unions, preeminently the railroad workers' unions, which had the most to gain in a labor movement devoted to negotiation and compromise, free from compromising and unpredictable political entanglements.

Despite the hegemony of syndicalism, important changes occurred after the coup. In the politically charged environment of the 1930s, in the midst of an offensive launched against the unions by the Argentine state and the international struggle against fascism, political neutrality was an increasingly difficult position to defend. Indeed, the vulnerability of such a position was what permitted an alliance of Socialists and Communists to recapture the country's principal labor confederation, the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), in 1936. The working class meanwhile was growing enormously as waves of migrants from the interior of the country poured into the principal cities, especially Buenos Aires. The spectacle of the conglomeration of vast numbers of workers in old and new urban neighborhoods and the growing strength of more radical unions, especially the Communists, disconcerted many Argentines but none more so than the military. Among the reasons for the 1943 coup d'état was the fear permeating important sectors of the military about social catastrophe if this growing sector of the population were not controlled. After the coup, the military government adopted two preventive strategies to achieve that end. On the one hand, it abolished the CGT and established a rump in its place, harassing and even imprisoning militant Communist union leaders in the process. On the other, under the

direction of Perón in the Secretariat of Labor, it began to encourage trade union organization, establish collective bargaining rights, and favor the unions in the government's arbitration of labor disputes.

Perón's standing among the workers naturally rose as a result of these policies, but it was not until it appeared that the policies themselves were going to be annulled that the unions rallied behind the charismatic colonel. During the first months of 1945 and as a result of the final defeat of the Axis powers, pressures for a restoration of democracy rose among broad sectors of the population, including the working class. The military government was besieged and its policies questioned. Perón became a favorite target of attack, largely no doubt because the policies of his labor secretariat had more deeply affected the interests of the propertied classes

than any other. The events surrounding his imprisonment and the working class protests throughout the country that led to his release have been recounted many times and there is no need to repeat them again here. What bears emphasizing is that the "old guard" trade union leadership that organized the October 17, 1945, general strike did so out of considerations of realpolitik and with more than a touch of opportunism. Their intention was to secure Perón's release from jail in order to solidify the gains made in the past few years. Once Perón made clear his intention to run in the impending presidential elections, this same leadership offered its support but as an independently organized labor party, the Partido Laborista. At a crucial moment in the Argentine working class's relationship with Perón, the initiative very much lay with the trade union movement; Perón was more its creature than the labor movement was his.

The old guard union leadership was not to have its way for very long. It is important to remember that while the labor leadership's support for Perón may have been based largely on realpolitik, the tens of thousands of workers who poured into Argentina's streets on October 17-18, 1945, demanding Perón's release also had developed a close personal attachment to the deposed colonel. Only this can explain the extraordinary turn of events that were to follow. After the election, Perón ordered the Partido Laborista to disband and for labor to incorporate itself into the highly personalist, vertically structured Partido Justicialista. Despite the objections from much of the old guard leadership, there was little protest from the vast majority of workers. Henceforth, labor was completely subordinated to the Peronist state. Nevertheless, subordination, in this context, did not mean simply, or even mainly, repression, but also empowerment. Throughout the decade of

Peronist government (1946-1955), the trade unions were strengthened, the working class's share of national income rose dramatically, and the working class gained an intangible but enormously important sense of self-worth and identification with the nation and the Peronist "revolution," the latter two becoming increasingly synonymous in their world view. Indeed, Perón's government was henceforth strongly weighted in favor of its popular component, the organized working class.

Perón, however, remained ambivalent about the worker populism he had been forced to embrace. As a career military officer, he remained loyal to the institution in which he had spent nearly his entire adult life, perhaps the only thing for which Perón felt some-

thing approaching genuine affection, and he was always searching for approval from his deepest desires even a partnership with the country's armed forces. Perón's hopes largely failed to materialize. Although he did cultivate a Peronist faction within the armed forces, especially the army, a bitter anti-Peronist current remained and grew stronger, one that would spearhead several conspiracies against him and finally overthrow his government in 1955. Perón had also relied on the support of other traditional institutions of Argentine society, preeminently the church, only to be disillusioned and turn against them when they proved to have independent ways and to be unwilling to subordinate their authority and self-interests to the Justicialist revolution. The business community, a particularly coveted source of support for his regime, was alternately hostile and opportunistic in its relationship with Perón's government, and when it did finally mobilize in support of his regime, it was in a guise very different from what he had envisioned and probably desired.

Perón therefore needed the workers, and the workers needed him. But as long as he remained in power, and with a regime whose ideological underpinnings preached unquestioning and steadfast loyalty to Perón and Evita (and upon her death in 1952 veneration for Evita's iconography), the initiative remained with the state. All this changed with Perón's overthrow in 1955 and the anti-Peronist hysteria immediately unleashed by the military governments and the economic elite, which was at least condoned by much of the middle class. For over a year, the country's laboring classes watched with anger and despair as many of the gains achieved under Perón were rolled back and as the trade union movement was all but dismantled. Such behavior only deepened the workers'

Peronist identity, and by early 1957 the Peronist unions, urged on by Perón and under the leadership of a new generation of tough, young trade unionists, reacted with strikes and a general policy of insubordination, including industrial sabotage that would last for several years and enter Peronist myth and history as "the Resistance."

It was after 1955 that the transforming effect that Perón, Peronism, and a decade of Peronist rule had exercised on the political culture of the working class was tellingly revealed. Despite the attempts of the left to recover the ground it had lost during Perón's government, the working class tenaciously held on to its Peronist identity and, most important, remained loyal to the "ideological" underpinnings of their movement. What did that ideology consist of? It would probably be best to describe it as fundamentally

pragmatic in the economic sphere but also composed of a militant, intransigent sensibility of self-worth, a sense of an inalienable birthright to participate in the nation's public life and receive its share of the country's wealth, as well as a blurring of the distinction between the nation and the working class. The workers' self-appellation of *el pueblo*, "the people," captures something of this sensibility. Beyond these things, the ideological content of Peronism was never precise, a fact that gave the movement flexibility and proved to be a great source of strength. Moreover, within this ideology as it was elaborated in the vicissitudes of history and experience, there were strains, never dominant but always lurking, that were closer to a class-oriented perspective. Indeed, during the Resistance and intermittently thereafter, the Peronist working class could be fired by intense class hatred and embrace ideas that were anathema to those that Perón and *Justicialismo* historically had espoused.

The traditional values of Peronism were those that held supreme when the state accepted the labor movement as an unavoidable reality and permitted it some degree of participation in national life. The subversive ones were those that rose to the surface when the state chose to deny these same things. But under both situations there was, from 1955 until his return to power in 1973, the nagging issue of Perón's exile and the proscription of the Peronist movement. This put the Peronist working class in a curious position with regard to the other social and political actors in the country. On the one hand, the unions needed to represent the workers in collective bargaining negotiations and service their needs through social welfare programs, retirement plans, and vacation colonies in a country in which the state had abandoned any

pretensions to such concerns. On the other hand, organized labor was effectively the political representative of the Peronist movement in these years, with Perón its recognized leader. So the working class played a rather conventional role in the country's economy, as well as socially, but an adversarial, destabilizing role within the political system.

This duality was what allowed the deservedly criticized but often misunderstood Peronist labor bureaucracy to become entrenched, but it also put clear limits on its ability to assume a role as mere intermediaries between the unions and the state, such as in the case of Brazil and Mexico. By the early 1960s the Resistance had waned and the state was passing through one of its accommodating phases. The class antagonisms and even revolutionary currents so promi-

ment during the Resistance subsided and gave way to a pragmatic business unionism, with the unions abandoning any pretensions to shop floor authority, accepting productivity schemes and incentives as a condition for wage increases, and with collective bargaining negotiations devolving into the hands of an increasingly perennial cast of trade union leaders. Both co-option by the state and acceptance as an independent actor, however, were prevented by the political dimension of the Peronist labor movement.

In those days, to speak of Peronism was to speak of Peronist trade unions. Perón's exile and the absence of a legal party created a situation in which union organizations, in addition to their professional functions, were transformed into the natural spokesmen of the Peronist masses. Thus, unions were agencies of wage negotiations and providers of a broad network of social services to their members. At the same time, unions became accepted as elements of power in the post-Peronist political system. Between 1956 and 1959, at a time when unionism was weak, the Peronist labor movement had launched the working masses against the state. But later on it began to adopt a different strategy. Since the union leadership had a clear sense of the limits of the possible in terms of its dealing with both the state and the country's capitalist classes, as well as an awareness of the real gains it could achieve by adopting a moderate, pragmatic attitude, labor militancy was now only selectively applied. The willingness to play tough and to compromise at the same time went hand in hand with a search for allies among those who were discontented with the government in power in order to avoid the risk of political isolation. The person who best embodied this new strategy was

Augusto Vandor, head of the metalworkers' union and a frequent go-between among businessmen, military officers, and politicians.

The evolution of the trade unions' strategy led to a clash with Perón. In the beginning, Peronist labor leaders followed the political instructions of their exiled leader. With time, however, they adopted the conservative logic of union institutions, which were able to succeed only if they had the goodwill of the centers of national power. Thus, it became increasingly difficult for them to follow Perón's tactics. Perón, proscribed from political life, had as his principal objective the destabilization of the governments laboriously erected by his enemies. Gradually, then, Perón found himself at odds with the more conformist aspirations of the union leaders; while they sought a political order that would make room for them

and permit their consolidation, Perón waged a tireless war of attrition from exile. After ten years of a precarious existence on the margins of legality, sectors of the Peronist movement began to consider the idea of emancipating themselves from the political tutelage of Perón. Many union leaders concluded that disciplined obedience to the exiled leader was preventing them from full inclusion in the prevailing power system. During 1964 and 1965, Vandor tried to organize a rupture but failed; the loyalty of the Peronist masses to their absent leader proved to be as vigorous as ever, and the project of creating a Peronism without Perón was abandoned.

This duality meant that the Peronist labor movement not only failed to emerge as a coherent force of change, but that it was also in many ways a moderating, conservative influence. The workers demanded accountability from the leadership in political terms that is, loyalty to Perón but not in terms of union democracy or even in negotiations with business. Only when all other alternatives were closed did the union leaders adopt drastic measures, and always with a clear purpose in mind, an immediate goal being to achieve *golpear y negociar*, that famous maxim of which Vandor himself had been the foremost practitioner. So as veritable trade union oligarchies emerged and then consolidated their power, it was with a great deal of rank-and-file consent. The moderate and opportunistic spirit that oriented labor's strategy did not generally clash, however, with the working class, because it was perfectly in keeping with its established Peronist culture. Nationalism, class harmony, social justice, state intervention in a popular economy—these ideas, not class war, socialism, or even democracy were the dominant components of that ideology, although, as

mentioned, Peronist ideology was amorphous and flexible enough that it could also embrace such sentiments when the situation warranted.

That is precisely what happened in the volatile period following the 1966 coup d'état, a decade of violence, utopianism, and experimentation in Argentina's history. With the channels for conducting a traditional business unionism shut off by the military dictatorship, the subversive content of Peronist trade unionism began to competeindeed, came into bitter conflictwith the hegemonic content, the latter visibly entrenched in the form of the labor bureaucracy. The *clasista* currents within the working class, which were especially strong in the recently industrialized centers of the interior and among the "new working class," represented the

achievement of both left-wing activists and a reified Peronist political identity, the latest incarnation of Peronism's chameleonlike capacity for change. Nevertheless, the trade unions advanced this *clasista* trade unionism that preached class struggle and, at least programmatically, fought for the establishment of a socialist state, making only modest political gains and those severely repressed with the restoration of Peronist rule in 1973. Once again, the potential power of the trade union movement was moderated by its dual character as a major social actor and the political backbone of the Peronist movement.

The 1973-1976 Peronist governments, in fact, revealed the fatal weakness of what was potentially one of the world's most powerful trade union movements. After Perón's death and with the marked shift to the right under his widow and successor, Isabel, the labor bosses were caught in a quandary. On the one hand, the prestige of a Peronist government allowed them to reassert their dominance within the trade unions and the Peronist movement, the latter's heart and soul being bitterly contested by its radicalized youth wing in the form of the Juventud Peronista and the Montoneros. On the other hand, the conservative economic program adopted by this same government meant that the failure to respond and adopt militant tactics in defense of workers' interests would provide the *clasista* currents with the opportunity they needed to contest the labor bureaucracy's control of the unions. Caught in the dilemma of protecting their position within the Peronist movement or within the unions, they predictably chose the latter and in 1975 launched a general strike that played no small part in leading Isabel Perón's government to an ignominious failure and the establishment of the

final and most tragic period of military rule in Argentina's grim twentieth-century history.

The history of the Peronist labor movement and the Peronist working class and the distinction is made intentionally for the period after 1976 has yet to be written. Certainly nothing definitive can be said until we have empirically grounded studies that address such questions as how changes occasioned in the labor market and labor process during the past twenty years of economic concentration and deindustrialization have altered the landscape of trade union politics in the country. The world view of workers in a world without Perón and at a time when so much of traditional Peronist ideology was being questioned if not thoroughly discredited (the virtues of a state-directed economy, for example) must

also be rigorously analyzed, as must the ever-widening sectoral and regional disparities within the working class and the labor movement, leadership and rank and file alike.

But one is also struck by the continuities in this history. The unprecedented repression of the labor movement under the 1976-1983 military governments caused dissident shop floor renegades to re-emerge and lead a labor resistance that was just starting to flex its muscles at the time of the Malvinas-Falklands War. The subsequent and rather precipitous restoration of democracy, and the election of a Radical as opposed to a Peronist government in 1983, was a godsend for the Peronist labor bosses, or at least for the reconstitution of a Peronist labor bureaucracy. The putting on of the *camiseta peronista* that is, the legitimacy bestowed among the rank and file by the mere fact of being a Peronist and in opposition to a Radical government, as well as the restitution of the *golpear y negociar* formula (and the some thirteen general strikes launched against Alfonsín's government can in no way be separated from the labor leadership's tactical considerations or reduced to a pure economism) in large measure re-established the old rules of the game in Argentine trade union politics.

If a Radical government was a godsend for perpetuating these patterns of behavior, the election of a Peronist government in 1989 and its recent re-election in 1995 may well constitute a fatal misfortune. As in 1973-1976 the Peronist trade union leadership has been forced to accept policies, in the name of solidarity with a Peronist government, that threaten their very existence. Although the opportunities for making private fortunes in a number of publicized cases are well known (such as those that the

privatization process has created for some union leaders), the vast majority have not and will not be able to participate in the spoils. For them, the dismantling of the trade union structures currently taking place under Menem's government, which will be every bit as "revolutionary" in its effects as Perón's creation of those structures, offers the prospect of the end of an era. The decentralization of collective bargaining, the privatization of those veritable trade union fiefdomsthe *obras sociales*the abrogation of indemnity payments, shop floor rights, even accident insurance, and finally talk of the ending of industrial unionism altogether, mean collectively the demise of Peronist trade unionism as it has existed for half a century.

In addition to institutional changes, the decline in labor's power has been precipitated by economic changes, especially the opening up of the economy. Since the crisis of the 1930s, Argentina's eco-

conomic policies were characterized by trade barriers and a labor market lacking structural labor surpluses. In such a context, the combination of protectionism and a low level of unemployment strengthened the unions' collective-bargaining powers. With the opening up of the domestic market promoted by the Menem administration, the situation changed drastically for the trade union movement. The lifting of trade barriers has caused business bankruptcies and therefore a loss of jobs. The companies that were in a position to compete with foreign businesses naturally became tougher negotiators over wage demands. Having to deal with a more formidable owners' front and weakened by the increase in unemployment, the unions have experienced a rapid and significant decline.

Theories that posit an enthusiastic conversion to the virtues of a market economy on the part of the labor leadership, however, are highly questionable. The leadership simply has too much to lose and too little to gain. Rather, it has accompanied Menem in this process, at least so far, partly as a result of the memory of the unions' contribution to the failure of the last Peronist government (that of Isabel, caused precisely by the leadership's unwillingness to support that government's economic program) and partly because the critical situation and hyperinflation in 1989 forced it to accept a series of emergency measures that, with the passing of time, have taken the force of an ideological revolution within the political wing of the Peronist movement. Having gone this far, it is now difficult if not impossible to go back. So the confrontational policies of the past have been replaced by collaboration, and not a few Peronist trade unionists are undoubtedly looking with nostalgia on the past, when they had the great fortune of operating under

non-Peronist governments and the unions could be free from the vexatious, meddling ways of a Peronist government.

The decline in the unions' importance in the country's economic structure has had its counterpart in new developments in the political realm. Since the restoration of democracy, the Peronist trade union leaders have experienced repeated reversals in their pretensions of influencing developments within the Peronist movement as a whole. In the search for a growth toward the center to gain the support of independent voters, the Peronist party leadership has attempted to create an appearance of independence with respect to their trade union allies of the past. With public opinion polls in hand, polls that show the prestige of the labor leadership as glaringly low, the party leadership has taken great pains to downplay

the once obligatory negotiations with the trade union apparatus in the electoral campaigns. This experience of no longer being the courted favorites is not a complete novelty; it happened once before, when Perón believed he was better able to interpret the changing moods of public opinion, organizing his return to power unaccompanied by the trade union bosses. But that had been a passing experience, because, once elected, the old caudillo brought them again to his side in order to include them in the government's neocorporatist project-the *Pacto Social*-through which he hoped to obtain the stability that he admired in the old European democracies.

Under the present circumstances, the experience of being in the political wilderness seems likely to become a prolonged if not permanent one, because the return of Peronism to power in 1989 embraced a governing strategy that is the antithesis of what Perón had followed. The state of economic crisis in which Carlos Menem's administration assumed office opened the door to a political formula at odds with neocorporatist deliberative procedures. It has become, strictly speaking, a formula that makes the key to governing the assumption of broad presidential powers and rule by decree (*decisionismo*), which, in the name of overcoming the crisis, looks to undermine practices through which it is necessary to acquire previous consent by the country's social actors. The politics of *fait accompli*, elevated to the category of a golden rule in order to manage the crisis, in great measure insulated the president from trade union pressures. To all this is added the barely disguised aspirations of President Menem to divorce the political fate of his administration from trade union support. The re-edition of this classic dynamic in the relationship between trade

unionism and Peronism has been realized, in this instance, by a strategy notable for its audacity: the inclusion in the governing coalition of members of the economic establishment. With these as his traveling companions, and with the plebiscitary backing of the populace, the one who today leads the destiny of Peronism has moved the pendulum of internal power sharply away from the unions.

What is remarkable, in such a context, is the effort that the government has had to make to change the industrial relations system. The administration's partial and slow accomplishments in this direction have lagged behind its ambitious objectives and stand in stark contrast to the speed of the economic reforms. In part, this is due to the fact that the unions found in the Peronist legislators valuable allies who could slow down the government's plans. In part,

this is because Menem did not find the necessary support in the decisive moments of decision and confrontation among his closest collaborators. This issue clearly has become the battleground chosen by the Peronist rank and file to show their doubts about Peronism's new direction. Recently, after a long period of passivity, the unions have dared to challenge Menem by calling general strikes. The widespread speculation surrounding the 1999 presidential elections has awakened in the union leadership, moreover, the hope of being able to exchange once again their support for the protection of sectoral privileges. All this agitation, all these calculations, cannot, however, hide what is a visible fact to everyone: The Peronist labor movement is presently fighting a rearguard action while the urgent task of its ideological and organizational reconversion remains pending.

III

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF PERONISM

6

The Origins of *Menemismo*

Vicente Palermo

One plausible way to view Argentine politics since 1989 would be to regard President Carlos Menem's administration as simply the culmination of long-term changes at work in Argentine society over the past decade. The novel directions undertaken during Peronism's new return to power might therefore be seen to express less recent and more inexorable changes in the predominant structures and world view of that society. Various authors have explicitly made this argument, among them Manuel Mora y Araujo. In a 1989 publication, Mora y Araujo, a political scientist and pollster, stated that "Argentina has entered a new phase in its political development and Menem's era comprises a part of it . . . changes which have emerged in the heart of society and changes in preferences and values." The most important characteristics of those changes would be a marked increase in the support for policies that one can classify as productivist rather than distributionary, private rather than given to state intervention. 1

Menem's assumption of the presidency made clear a determination to govern in accordance with these new trends by attempting to establish a coalition "capable of giving a voice to the most productive sectors of society, harmonizing its productivity expectations with its privatizing ones." Edgardo Kvaternik has noted that, for that purpose, we have a *menemismo* that "expresses an anticollectivist populism: populism because it calls the people

above and in opposition to the established powers of the inflated state and the interests created by the traditional political leadership for its own benefit." Its message appeals "to the common man and common citizen who has been deceived by the statist and demagogic solutions of the traditional political leadership which have led to

the deterioration in the quality of public services which the state owes to the nation: health, education, and security."

According to this interpretation, in turn, a favorable prediction regarding the future prospects of *menemismo* might follow: *menemismo* as a political force that galvanizes these new societal wills and has the ability to direct them in a lasting way. The prospect that around the leadership of Menem there will coalesce a stable expression of these new trends is suggested in Mora y Araujo's previously cited work, which formulates two questions that clearly point to the conditions under which a continuation of the president's new coalition will be possible:

The *justicialista* government's turn to the right and its move to the center-right as an established current within the Argentine electorate supports the conjecture of the strengthening of a *justicialista*-conservative coalition in the near future. With this hypothesis . . . two central questions remain: Will there be room for a conservative opposition of the center-right to the government, and will there emerge populist proposals not in support of a conservative program and the market economy, independent of the center-left? . . . If the answer to the first question is no . . . that would mean that Argentina is headed towards a kind of two-party system with a popular-conservative coalition on the one hand and a center-left opposition on the other. If the answer to the second is no . . . that would mean that there has occurred a profound transformation of the Argentine political system. Peronism would have ceased to play the role of a populist alternative with corporatist roots, as far removed from a social democracy as from a modern conservatism that accepts the market economy. . . . We would be in the presence of a return of the dominant coalition in *justicialismo* to its conservative origins. 2

If the results of the 1991 congressional elections are taken into

account in trying to answer these questions, the results would seem to provide grounds for a positive response to this hypothesis: There was no space for a conservative opposition to the government, and there was no populist splinter movement against the Justicialist Party.³ *Menemismo* would therefore assume the profile of a political force that, without having lost the electoral base of Peronism, had acquired the ability to speak for "the most productive sectors of society" and, at the same time, had maintained in a subordinate role that is, limiting its potential to act as a nucleus or serious partner in distributionist coalitions a dominant sector of the trade union movement.

With these arguments serving as a starting point, the purpose of this essay is to analyze the origins and in the process speculate about the durability of *menemismo*. Succinctly, my argument is the following: Certainly the Menem administration is supported by

profound trends toward change in Argentine society, in agreement with Mora y Araujo's assessment. Nevertheless, the outstanding characteristics of the political behavior in which such trends have been brought to life can be understood only in the light of other key factors: those linked to the imperatives of an administration in the midst of an uncontrollable crisis such as the state and the economy were experiencing in 1989. In this way, *menemismo* has been, in essence, the response of a presidential administration compelled by an acute crisis, and it cannot be understood removed from the demands of governing. If its origins are more conjunctural than has generally been thought, its durability may also be more precarious than is widely believed.

Before continuing, it is appropriate to clarify exactly what is understood by *menemismo*, the configuration of discursive and symbolic elements, as well as the political style, that have accompanied governmental action since 1989. 4 Thus defined, in my judgment, *menemismo* cannot be understood as a lasting political phenomenon (in any case, its active life will not outlive the exit of President Carlos Menem from the presidency), no matter how irreversible the changes in the economic model and the structural changes to the state introduced by the present Peronist government may be. The reason for this is the strong determination of *menemismo* to manage the imperatives of the crisis that is to say, the concrete characteristics that this discursive and symbolic configuration and political style have assumed, as well as the content and overall results of the structural reforms, have put a considerable distance between *menemismo* and a great part of the people.

Another work analyzes in detail the political dynamic of the structural reforms of the state and economy, reforms formulated and implemented under the pressures and constraints of the crisis.⁵ Here a reference to that analysis will be made only to point out the political and partisan factors that are the subject of this chapter. As was noted in that work, faced with the predicament of governing in a critical situation, the president resolved to overcome the crisis by adopting a radical program of reforms. He believed that the principal political problems in bringing such a program home to port were two: a problem of weakness and a credibility crisis. The means employed to overcome those problems consisted, basically, of making a virtue of necessity. Compelled to define his course of action and prove his political capacity to follow it, Menem strove to demonstrate a deep conviction in the necessity of the adopted program and a determination to carry it out. This would send an

unmistakable signal that the government had tied its own fortunes to the fortunes of the economic plan.

The administration team would ultimately manage to overcome its initial weakness, thus closing the credibility gap that would keep it in check in the early months of the reform program. The determination with which the administration carried out its program was greater than had been thought possible and encountered fewer obstacles than had been expected. The reforms (privatizations, fiscal restraint, liberalization of the economy) were set in motion, and in September 1991 the government savored an electoral victory after thirty extremely difficult months in office. From this perspective, Menem's administration can be considered a success. However, looked at from the point of view of Peronism's political evolution, as well as from the public's more general changes in preferences and values, the presidential legacy is likely to have more ambiguous results. On the one hand, what the new *menemista* ethic presents, in its basic characteristics, is too distant from even the *aggiornado* Peronism of our days for the movement to recognize itself fully. This seriously limits *menemismo*'s future options vis-à-vis the Justicialist Party. At most, *menemismo* might gain political legitimacy within the ranks of Peronism itself as "what had to be done because of the weight of the circumstances"; it will have a difficult time converting itself into a permanent way of doing things.

On the other hand, society as a whole hardly seems fertile political terrain for *menemismo* to flourish as a lasting current in politics. This is due as much to the limits that the increasing independence of public opinion places on the emergence of new political forces

as to the numerous points of conflict between emerging public preferences and values and the political style of the *menemistas*, as well as to the concrete results of the administration. If things remain the same, *menemismo* as we know it will not outlive the present crisis. 6

Menemismo and the Imperatives of Governmental Management

In 1989, after hurriedly assuming the presidency and in the midst of a full-fledged hyperinflationary crisis, Menem announced a broad program of structural reforms of the economy and the state.⁷ Rather than making a decision, one might say, the government was literally compelled to implement reforms by a fatal combination of circumstances that culminated in the country's financial collapse.

Hyperinflation granted the chief executive ample room for political maneuvering with respect to the coalition that had brought him to power. But that, in turn, imposed a narrow margin of decision-making power: The reforms required an extremely precise content they needed to finish with the fiscal deficits.

The perception of the government team before assuming power that resulted from the extremely delicate situation seems to have been dominated by two concerns: its political weakness and its low credibility. His administration barely under way, Menem discovered that naming a leading executive of the Bunge y Born holding company was not sufficient to overcome the credibility crisis. It was in this context that the government found itself strongly compelled to make a virtue of necessity. Because the reforms were imposed by necessity and not conviction, the public had reason to believe that they would be reversed, despite claims to the contrary. To narrow the credibility gap, the reformist team would have to demonstrate how truly and deeply it was convinced of the new ideas, with what determination it would implement them, and how much control it had over the situation.

The economic team quickly ceased to justify the reform program by the imperatives of necessity and moved to the realm of conviction. The path that the economic collapse had imposed was presented as a sincere conversion to the market economy. The conceptual nucleus from which this change of heart was defended was quite simple: the fiscal crisis and the extreme impairment of the state's effectiveness were interpreted as a demonstration of the state's congenital inability to intervene effectively in the economy, offering an extreme market solution as the only possible

mechanism for coordinating the decisions of the country's economic sectors.

This dizzying conversion from necessity to virtue would be expressed on two levels, one discursive and the other symbolic. At the discursive level, President Menem would handle himself with a slight touch of ambiguity, not hesitating to confront the pockets of resistance within the Justicialist Party but, at the same time, avoiding the unnecessary creation of a weak flank by provoking those who remained passive or who offered only lukewarm support. Thus, he would state: "How (can they accuse me) of being conservative? We are talking about a humanized capitalism, a social capitalism."

But at the same time he would emphasize his determination to carry forward the privatizations within fixed deadlines, criticizing those Peronists who pleaded for time to consider them more

carefully: "Sectors of the Justicialist Party have said it . . . they are asking for a postponement of two more months . . . after which they are going to make the same request. They're big government people (*estatistas*)! . . . a mentality that Perón himself had discarded in 1954 when he put into practice oil deregulation and condemned in a total and absolute way, for being inefficient and wasteful, the state companies."

The second factor, the symbolic, is still the most important and clearly expresses the radical nature of the government's new conviction by translating it into executive decisions, some of them directly linked to the very process of formulation and execution of the reforms. 8 The designation of the leader of Argentina's conservative party, Alvaro Alsogaray, as advisor "for dealing with the foreign debt," or of his daughter, María Julia Alsogaray, as the privatization supervisor of the state telephone company, ENTel, are examples, not to mention the hug Menem would give to the rabid if then somewhat senile anti-Peronist, Admiral Isaac Rojas.⁹

These moves brought risks and rebellions within Peronism's own ranks since they required tremendous symbolic and ideological support. Thus, the rupture with the past entailed a redefinition of collective values as a way of making a sharp and irreversible break with that past. Menem would propose, for example, what was, for a Peronist president, an unusual interpretation of Argentine history: "Until 1952 we were used to living almost without working . . . thanks to the era of the *vacas gordas* that the country was living through. . . . (That year) Perón himself lived the hardships of the crisis. . . . During his second administration the people ate black bread . . . we stood in line because of

shortages. . . . Nobody had the guts to take the bull by the horns and that's why we had the disastrous 1955 coup."¹⁰

The perception of a credibility problem also influenced the strategies that the government employed in the face of resistance. These entailed an apprenticeship. The government tended to underestimate the very costs of a polarized climate and to consider that its determination and toughness in confronting the opposition in themselves constituted an example by which the "public" could evaluate its reformist convictions and its ability to carry out the reforms.

The President and His Party

The party and the Peronist unions tended to be perceived by the public as potential threats to the reformist program. Nevertheless,

if one looks at the relationship between the government and the party in its entirety, those beliefs proved to be at least partly unfounded. The government did not meet strong resistance from the political actors in its own ranks. The relationship between Menem and the Justicialist Party at the moment of the former's assumption of the presidency was complex. In the first place, there is the question of Menem's leadership. The specter of the disintegration of Peronism was driven away only with the 1987 elections. The efforts of the *renovadores* had contributed decisively to democratizing the movement.¹¹ The triumph of Menem, even if it implied a partial setback to the direction given by the *renovadores* and the restoration of some traditional Peronist demands, completed the task of his rivals. As one observer has noted, "For the first time since the death of Perón, the movement had become united upon gaining a leader who, although confirmed by the procedures of party democracy, created around himself an aura," something that contributed to explaining why his control over the party was all the more effective.

Peronism triumphed in the 1989 presidential elections, therefore fulfilling certain conditions necessary so that government and party relations did not shipwreck on the shoals of the inevitable tensions once the government launched reforms for which the Peronist Party then felt little enthusiasm. Contrary to public fears, party unity turned out to be adequate to the tasks of government. But this was so because it was a unity that had changed considerably in nature. Until the restoration of democracy in 1983, Peronism was a movement and not a party. Its collective imagery was of a popular movement and its political culture was anti-party. Its organizational composition was that of an ensemble of structures and diverse,

unequal interests mass organizations, political factions, elites, clients, unions, and so forth that were essentially incompatible within a single party. How could differences be reconciled, for example, between radical youth groups, local caudillo party bosses, and trade union officials if the nature and degree of their power were not compatible within the abstract concept of "one man, one vote"?

It was this kind of populist-mass movement "unity" that made Peronism ill suited to govern in periods of austerity, except at the price of unleashing an unrestrained confrontation throughout the government and the state apparatus. With the death of Perón, and after the 1983 electoral defeat, Peronism once again lacked the unified leadership that Perón had managed at great pains to maintain,

and at times rebuild, after 1955. Peronism seemed condemned to swing between a rigid, hierarchically but arbitrarily run movement, and anarchy. With the reform movement undertaken by the *renovadores*, the capacity for expressing new interests appeared to increase, not only because of the reduction of the heterogeneity of Peronism but also because of the broadening of its institutional field of play. The greatest legacy of the *renovadores* was to democratize Peronism from within and to endow it with a relatively cohesive structure of authority that was now that of a party and not a movement. Thus, Peronism gained an impressive institutional development, as well as casting off the ballast of those of its traits and supporters least compatible with the functioning of a party. 12

The *renovadores* had also helped to resolve a key question: the relationship between the party and the unions. The latter had historically been the principal constituency within the party. The weight of the unions within Peronism had increased after the fall of Perón in 1955. In 1973 he had managed only with great difficulty to restrain the labor movement. After his death, it was the union leadership itself who occupied the principal posts and exercised direct control over the party. The *renovadores'* triumph put an end to this strategic imbalance in the party between the political and union leadership. The new constellation of forces is much more favorable to the politicians and is, together with internal democracy, a fundamental contribution of the *renovadores* to Peronism and democratic consolidation in Argentina. Despite all this, throughout the Alfonsín years, the union leaders continued to be an important point of reference for the political leadership. The *renovadores* had not managed to find a formula that would subordinate union interests to political ones in alignment with party

strategies. Therefore, and despite the fact that they had achieved important victories without owing any outstanding debts to the trade unionists, when they ran in the 1988 party caucuses they lost to Menem. The process of "party-building" within Peronism was once again left an unresolved issue.

Important changes, nonetheless, ultimately proved irreversible. We know that, throughout the party-building process, the union leadership had generally lost power; it was now difficult for it automatically to assert its authority in the fight over party nominations and political posts. Moreover, under the protection of the politicians, a new sector, numerically insignificant but of great influence, had begun to appear on the horizon: the party economists. If

until only recently Peronist economists had had to nestle under the wings of a trade union leader, now they had begun to look for protection from the politicians. It is not too bold to say that, through the influence of these economists, businessmen began to be paid more attention within the heart of the party; in some ways, they gained more fluid contacts and more respected spokesmen for their points of view. The winning of party autonomy vis-à-vis the labor movement apparently created a space in which the representation of party interests could take place according to new rules. 13

The *renovadores* gave rise to, and nurtured, numerous changes that *menemismo* would soon refine. In this trajectory, Peronism to a great extent lost the ability to maintain intact the various ideological components that, in its makeup as well as its history as a political actor, it had synthesized (nationalism, anti-imperialism, socialism, authoritarianism, federalism, militarism, and so forth). It has been asserted that a basic characteristic of populism consists of its "presentation of the popular-democratic interpellations as a synthetic-antagonistic whole with respect to the dominant ideology."¹⁴ Menem, removed from the so-called fundamentalist roots of Peronism (the absolute demand for a mythic unity, an identity as a national-popular movement, and so on) served as the spark that ignited the explosion of this ensemble, an explosion in preparation for a long time. For that reason, it should be noted that the dissolution of the populist-popular movement unity of Peronism does not mean the demise of Peronism as a political force. Peronism is today much more homogeneous, more a party than a movement; and the sectors more clearly representative of those components of the populist identity have isolated themselves

or faded into relatively marginal expressions. The bulk of the electorate and of the basic social components of Peronism, however, preferred to remain within the party.

Menemismo appears to be (and in part is) the end of Peronism as a populist movement. But this is so above all because, compelled by the limits of the crisis and the imperatives imposed on the political management of that crisis, the government's actions served as a catalyst for a process that, in another context, would have worked itself out more slowly. And there is no basis for believing that in this process the fragments of the populist identity that the trade union leader Saúl Ubaldini, Col. Aldo Rico, and a dissident group of Peronist congressmen (among others) represented might have continued as a significant force within the party.¹⁵ But the

important point is that the road toward the disappearance of Peronism's populist character was first traveled by the *renovadores* and not Menem. 16

In summary, and looking at *Justicialismo* itself, the precondition for the *menemista* administration was the existence, before it assumed office, of changes that had perceptibly transformed this political movement and that had already distanced it from its historical populist character. The specifically populist tendencies of Peronism were already substantially disarticulated. From a regime-movement with a populist identity and a corporatist ideology, Peronism had evolved into acquiring the morphology of a party with (increasingly tenuous but not inconsequential) populist traits and neocorporatist inclinations. In that sense, the continuity between *renovación* and *menemismo* is much greater than is generally believed; and the heterodoxy that *menemismo* flaunts, an outcome sui generis of the *renovación*, at times prevents distinguishing clearly between the profound as opposed to the superficial changes.

The administration-party relationship and the administration-union relationships during the Menem government have reflected those changes. One factor that worked in favor of the executive during decision making and the launching of the reforms was the precarious situation the remaining *renovadores* were in, or at least perceived themselves to be in. Antonio Cafiero, José Luis Manzano, José Manuel De la Sota, Carlos Grosso, just to name the principal "points of reference," felt that their respective governing and party positions were in danger. Cafiero needed to ensure his re-election to the governorship of Buenos Aires province, Grosso to

neutralize the pressures seeking to remove him from the mayor's office in the federal capital, De la Sota to gain the support to become the party nominee once again for the governorship of Córdoba, and Manzano simply to maintain himself in the strategic position of Peronist party whip in the House of Representatives. All harbored reasonable fears of being pushed aside and concluded that only Menem himself could ensure their political survival, to defend them from the *menemistas*, so to speak. Menem, of course, observed the situation and benefited from it.¹⁷ The logic of party competition was capable of absorbing, therefore, a potentially very risky dispute.

The political space that the former *renovadores* had at their disposal to endorse Menem's policies in exchange for his political support was increased even more by the situation the unions were in. Despite the immensity of the reform program, the administra-

tion had not encountered a consistent and united opposition from the trade unions. Simplifying things somewhat, one can distinguish three different lines of behaviors, based on varying responses and tactics. First is the camp of "confrontation," composed of unions or fractions of unions, which, for different reasons, directly opposed the reforms, working for their repeal or failure. Some of these unions assumed a posture of open resistance, disregarding how the public would perceive their actions. Others apparently believed that they simply had little room to adopt a more flexible opposition.

In the second category, that of the "hardline" negotiators, was an important group of unions that understood that a position of conditional support for the process would win them greater benefits than confrontation. The position of those unions was unavoidably ambiguous. It consisted of an offer of support for the reform measures and the austerity plan but included the option of going over to open opposition in the event that the implementation of both was not satisfactorily negotiated between the affected unions and the reformist team. But a chief characteristic of this position was that its opposition carried implicit limits that the union leadership systematically abstained from overstepping.

Paradigmatically represented by the leader of the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM), Lorenzo Miguel, this sector was far from sharing the vision of things that infused the reformist spirit of the government, as it would demonstrate between 1989 and 1991.

Yet there was another factor that weighed heavily on this group, compelling them for the moment to limit the pressures against the government (widening, indirectly, the room for maneuver of the party leadership): the demonstration effect of the fateful experience

that had culminated in the establishment of the military dictatorship in March 1976. If we consider that last period of Peronist rule, the transformation experienced by Peronism can be clearly seen. The most influential actors, not the least of which were Peronists, had then been guilty of confronting one another without taking into account the ultimate consequences of their actions. They felt that this scenario had to be avoided at all costs.

Finally, at the other end of the spectrum, was the "collaborationist" camp (or the "softline" negotiators) who recruited those unions, or factions of unions, whose relationship with the government was not, in principle, subject to the conditions influencing the other union factions; they submitted to the reform program and attempted to obtain the best possible concessions within it. Their

motivations were linked to their position with regard to the government's program. They tended to perceive themselves as part of the potential power structure resulting from the economic and social changes that the reform program meant for the country. There was a secondary consideration, subordinate perhaps but a consideration all the same. By betting on the government reform initiatives, these unions gave up the possibility of accompanying support with a credible threat of opposition. This does not mean that they followed the government in a completely slavish way, but that the latter knew that these unions, no matter how tough they were as negotiators, did not hold the trump card of retreat in their hands.

The "confrontation" camp loomed, without doubt, as threatening, given the number of companies that were to be privatized and the possibility of those unions joining other sectors affected by the austerity program and thereby becoming a unified and powerful opposition. Moreover, the reactions of the sectors affected by reform policies dovetailed with the give-and-take of conflict and cooperation that the austerity measures caused in society as a whole. The early crisis of the trade union hierarchy, which resulted in its splitting up almost immediately after Menem assumed office, suggested the possibility that there might cluster around the figure of Ubaldini a union opposition predisposed to an open struggle against the reforms. That did not happen. Ubaldini (that is, the sector that chose confrontation with respect to the reform policies) was a pertinacious opponent, but not a very effective one. The manner in which he positioned himself in relation to the reform initiatives isolated him from that part of society that might have sympathized with the demands of primary school teachers for

higher salaries or retirees' demands for increased social security payments but would be suspicious of the arguments and tactics adopted by the unions against the privatizations.

The negotiating camp, from its position of relative autonomy, stayed with its principal protector, Lorenzo Miguel, a decision that established strict limits to its opposition. Ubaldini had sought to assume its leadership, organizing opposition on the basis of a supposed total rejection of austerity and privatization (indeed, the majority of the unions that supported him were from the public sector). He did not obtain such leadership because of the need to fend off the pressures that, from the beginning, were exercised by the *menemista* leadership of the CGT to have him removed. While Ubaldini was defending himself, the economic and state reform bills became laws without giving rise to protests or trade union mobili-

zations worthy of the name. The low intensity of the unions' reaction contrasted with the high intensity of pressure coming from business in favor of the reforms.

The pertinacity of Ubaldini and, above all, the belated support offered him by the leader of the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica precipitated the split in the CGT, but the beneficiary of this was not Ubaldini but the hardline-negotiating autonomous wing of the trade union movement, headed by Miguel. Thanks to the rupture, this wing became a key player in any realignment of power within the Peronist movement. The UOM, threatened by austerity and the opening up of the economy, was, at the same time, one of the most powerful unions in the private sector and the one with the greatest influence over the others in collective bargaining. Its tactical strengthening would thus be perceived as a discouraging sign on the part of business regarding the stabilization plan's chances of success. Nevertheless, the role of this sector was favorable to the government as far as the general progress of the reform plans was concerned, systematically limiting the possibility that the principal leaders and confrontational unions would be transformed into catalysts of the diffuse opposition forces. In effect, by depending on the acquiescence of the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica, the dissident CGT forestalled opposition initiatives to the government that had real possibilities of taking off. 18

In the congress, by virtue of the "all or nothing" spirit adopted for passing the crucial laws of the Economic Emergency and Reform of the State program, the administration met fewer difficulties than expected from its own party members. To be sure, the chief executive did not have to go to great lengths to find enough

congressmen in both houses willing to lend themselves eagerly to his strategy. The president's party in the senate (where the government expected fewer surprises) was especially disciplined. But the Peronist congressmen did not behave very differently.¹⁹ The rebels expressed their disagreement only on rather minor issues and those in extremely small numbers. The objections of *Justicialistas* on matters regarding the privatizations or capitalization of the foreign debt were expressed only on finer points of detail; any explicit reference to the legitimacy of these policies disappeared.

One factor that worked in the president's favor as far as his relations with the Justicialist Party are concerned was the relationship he managed to establish with public opinion. It is important here to note the active support for the reforms that the government managed to stir up from a broad sector of society and that took

shape outside the party system, setting boundaries on the opposition and strengthening the *menemista* position in Peronism's internal party struggle. This triangular game would reach its crowning moment on the occasion of the Marcha del Sí in April 1990, held in support of Menem's amnesty decree for military officers accused of human rights abuses during the 1976-1983 military governments. 20

Without a doubt, despite the depth of the reforms and the change of direction those reforms represented for Peronism, the general tone prevailing between the Peronist government and its party was not seriously conflictual. Wherever one looks during Alfonsín's presidency, government-party relations were stormier and the governing party's senators and congressmen more captious. It was the Radical government, not the Peronist one, that had to make enormous efforts within its own party to convince its members that the road to be traveled was not a violation of the party's basic principles. With respect to the *menemista* administration, both party and congress found themselves overwhelmed by the decisions and measures they had to adopt, but there reigned a rationalizing mood that, to judge by the lack of criticism, did not want in effectiveness. Hyperinflation, the "country in ruins," Alfonsín's hasty turning over of the government, and so forth were all arguments repeatedly wielded by the principal Peronist leaders, as much by the now defunct *renovadores* as by the *menemistas*. The Peronist legislators resorted to these arguments to avoid having to defend the reform program either on the basis of the president's newfound reformist faith or his decisions that were more conspicuously intended to increase the credibility of the

government through the "public," while, at the same time, respecting in a disciplined fashion the administration's decisions.

In conclusion, important sectors from both the Justicialist Party and the trade unions, excluded by the chief executive in the formulation of policy, supported those policies all the same, adopting as their own (albeit to a limited degree and somewhat superficially) the discursive and symbolic elements and the political style that constitute *menemismo*.

Menem and Public Opinion

With regard to the public support that the president has had throughout his administration, it seems necessary to discuss three elements. The first is related to the kind of backing that he obtained from

different social sectors and groups; the second to the political style that the government adopted; and the third, to the resulting outline of the reforms. Although there was ample reason for assuming that the launching of the reforms would awaken strong resistance in society, the government retained popular support for the program as a whole, support that, although erratic, always was sufficient for maintaining the reformist direction. If the speed and depth of the reform program are taken into account, one is struck by the minimum degree of social and political resistance it provoked among diverse sectors of society and the acceptance that the reforms enjoyed.

In Palermo and Torre (1992) it is noted that the public support for the administration was due to the convergence of two factors, resulting in what was called a "consensus of escape to the future" that surrounded the reforms. There was the kind of social support arising from convictions and ideological-normative motivations, or linked to more structured, less conjunctural perceptions of self-interest and social groupings. This applied to a sector of society that had clearly defined its interests and was already apparent before the onset of hyperinflation. It was confident that the situation would improve with the reforms, and confidence in the future mobilized the support of this group. Some authors speculate that, even before Menem's election, there had appeared a growing segment of public opinion in Argentina independent of traditional social and political forces and of unprecedented diversity relative to previous democratic periods. In those periods, the interplay of political actors parties with faithful electoral constituencies and mobilized social groups was what controlled the national political dynamic. This independent sector was a novelty in Argentina's

political traditions. The size of this sector was not simply the result of the new role of the mass media. It also represented processes of modernization, social anomie, and generational rifts, all of which influenced society's preferences and behavior.

On the other hand, the reformist administration found an additional source of support in those sectors most dramatically affected by the crisis. This fact might also be attributable to the more profound changes experienced by Argentine society in recent history. It is possible to ask oneself whether the cumulative effects of the failure of the 1973-1976 Peronist government, the *Proceso*, and the incredible concentration of wealth within the setting of a stagnant economy ravaged by high inflation, did not seriously undermine the political capacity of the popular sectors for self-expression,

sectors that were now simply poor. These impoverished popular sectors, instead of demanding power, were now on the edge of desperation and were demanding security and protection. This is a question difficult to answer at the present time. But, in any case, what is certain is that throughout this period the absence of any popular response to the reforms and the apparent acceptance of the reform program seem closely related to the outbreaks of hyperinflation.

Menem did not offer any typically conservative palliatives to those who were suffering the "effects of austerity." He did not raise money for social relief, and the path taken by the laws and initiatives adopted to address their plight was no less tortuous than that followed by the social groups whose sufferings these initiatives were supposed to alleviate. Nevertheless, Menem's government was protecting these groups from the affliction they had already experienced and most feared: hyperinflation. Thus, the support of these sectors was not compelled by any great conviction regarding a prosperous future, but by the necessity of avoiding an unbearable present or a terrifying return to the past, a past whose extreme hardships were already known firsthand. 21

It is obvious that the general orientation of the government, as previously noted, represents a significant break with traditional Peronist policies. There is, nonetheless, a by no means secondary dimension in which Menem has been, on the contrary, very Peronist: a pragmatism that allowed him to muster the moral force necessary to sustain the political will that costly and controversial reforms demanded. Everyone knows that executing governmental policies is far from a merely administrative task. It demands a

substantial dose of willpower and skill. If this is true in more or less normal periods, it is even more so during times of crisis. For technocratic though their drafting may be, reforms are essentially political operations, and political will is an indispensable component, although not in itself sufficient, for choosing them and carrying them out. This political will requires a substratum of moral force if it is to be sustained. Peronism may have historically identified itself with conceptions of the state and economic policies diametrically opposed to those that discursively inform the reformist course adopted. But at the same time, the reforms are a case study in the most vigorous pragmatism. "Reality is the only truth," Perón used to say. Menem is, without the slightest doubt, a man of the same stripe, one for whom being elected in no way presumes a commitment or "pact" regarding government policy. At most, it may imply a delegation of power, which is quite the contrary.

At one of the most critical moments in his administration, desperately in need of open support, Menem offered Eduardo Angeloz, the Radical Party candidate for the presidency in 1989 and governor of Córdoba, a position as a kind of chief of staff of his cabinet. By bringing in Angeloz it was widely believed that the government would win support for the reform program. In an open letter to the president, Angeloz conditioned any agreement on prior negotiations with his party and proposed that any course of government action be subject to popular opinion via a plebiscite.²² In Menem's reply through the mass media, the president, overlooking the serious difficulties of governing with a program that was a stark about-face from the policies he had outlined in his electoral campaign (a program that resembled much more the one Angeloz had run on), rejected the idea of a plebiscite as a silly idea. The people had already had their say on May 14, 1989 (the day of the presidential elections). They had voted for him, not for a program.

Very soon, however, this attitude led to a decree-making political style that concentrated the policymaking process exclusively in the hands of the chief executive. The government's management of the crisis was acquiring an improvised look in which the "emergency" decrees were pushing it to the legal limits. There is no doubt that the president enthusiastically embraced the legal mechanisms available to him. There is, however, little that is surprising in this. Beyond reflecting Menem's personal preferences, the frequent use of decrees responded to the logic of carrying out reform in a crisis situation in which the influence of social and political actors on the formulation of public policy through the free play of representative institutions is an extremely elusive desideratum.

The measures that the government adopted to overcome its weakness and lack of credibility had a decisive impact on the reform process. These problems contributed to keeping the government constantly on tenterhooks, not managing before March 1991 to keep its head above water and thereby detracting from the effectiveness of the stabilization program. It increased the government's need to subordinate the requirements of the stabilization to sectoral reform policies. This tension indelibly marked the pace and substance that the policies were assuming. Its consequences can be observed in the privatization policies, in the sale of public service monopolies with protected markets, and in the more attractive terms for potential investors. In the search for greater credibility, the government imposed a breakneck timetable of privatizations and sacrificed the regulatory framework needed to safeguard the

interests of consumers. The pace of trade liberalization was also limited by short-term demands. In its efforts to discipline business and avoid a price increase, the government accelerated the reduction of tariffs and the elimination of quotas. The objective of price discipline was achieved, but, at the same time, the government jeopardized the survival of companies that could have increased their efficiency only through a more orderly transition to foreign competition.

The Prospects of *Menemismo* after the Reforms

Can *menemismo* be conceived as a lasting phenomenon that, freed from the narrow constraints that the Justicialist Party imposes on it, might express and harness the new "pro-market" forces, thereby fusing their interests with the antipolitical inclinations originating in the low prestige of the political parties and their leadership? In fact, from 1989 to 1991 this possibility was broached whenever there appeared to be a chance that less ephemeral political backing might be forthcoming, as reflected in public opinion polls and more actively in the massive turnout of the Plaza del Sí and other public demonstrations. Nevertheless, there are diverse factors that came together to make *menemismo* qua mass movement little more than a device that the president used to pressure the party and strengthen his leadership.

It has been argued elsewhere that the consensus that accompanied the reformist administration was expressed in the convergence of two different sentiments in public opinion: a confidence in the future and a desire to escape the past. It would appear, however, that this consensus, Menem's re-election notwithstanding, is tending to fall apart, in great measure because of the impact of the

specific characteristics that the administration has been acquiring as expressed in symbolic and discursive content, political style, and concrete results. The possibilities of permanently instilling a new identity in the pro-market forces are severely limited by the very characteristics of the independent sector of public opinion.

Typically, the creation of such new movements depends on the existence of "available" sectors that can be guided and can find expression through some collective organization. This prerequisite does not seem very compatible with a broadening of an independently minded sector of public opinion, ever more estranged from any political affiliation and preferring to express itself through diverse options and voting to dialogue with the mass media (reward-

ing or punishing) in a Schumpeterianlike electoral political setting. It is precisely this capacity to distinguish its support for specific policies from support for government policy in toto that constitutes one of this group's most beneficial characteristics. This pragmatism was invaluable for bringing the reforms safely home to port, especially on those frequent occasions when the favorable opinion of the government's handling fell precipitously. In fact, the sectors that are most in harmony with *menemismo*'s discursive orientations seem to be those least prone to assume stable political identities. 23

An outstanding characteristic of the public's preferences and mood with regard to the economy and the role of the state is its marked heterogeneity, a heterogeneity that establishes a far from negligible distance from the unequivocally neoliberal discourse and symbols of *menemismo*. The diversity of the public's new attitudes was noted early by Mora y Araujo and Noguera (1986), analysts to whom public opinion polls revealed not necessarily a flight of the population to a neoliberal ideology but rather a steady process of incorporation of some antistatist values in different ideological trappings.

It is certain that the support for private enterprise has conquered a space in society that it will not easily lose again. At the same time, support for structural reforms clearly identified with the privatizations and reform of the state never ceased to be significant during the period under analysis. But the favorable mood toward privatization does not seem to extend to the idea of restricting the state to providing the classic public services exclusively. Rather, it emphasizes putting an end to Argentina's predatory state and its pork-barrel, influence-peddling capitalism. For example, Table 1

shows the results of a survey of twelve hundred respondents carried out by Zuleta Puceiro in the federal district and greater Buenos Aires:

Table 1. State Role in the Economy

	<i>October 1988</i>	<i>December 1989</i>	<i>March 1990</i>
Against any state intervention	17.4%	13.9%	27.4%
For regulatory intervention	14.7%	27.8%	23.9%
For basic intervention	41.6%	41.8%	25.1%
For massive intervention	20.4%	8.3%	11.1%
No opinion	5.9%	8.2%	12.4%

Source: Zuleta Puceiro Poll, 1988-1990.

The degree to which public opinion fluctuated in accordance with the conjunctural crisis and not deeper principles that might

make it oscillate less wildly is striking. The fall in support for unabashed anti-interventionism between October 1988 and December 1989 is not easy to explain, although it drops at a time of interventionism *tout court*. But the growth in March 1990 of the no-interventionist position came after the second bout of hyperinflation. What stands out is the number, even in March 1990, of respondents wary of the extreme positions. 24

Finally, analysis by socioeconomic status is significant. Whereas 31.7 percent of those interviewed in December 1989 assigned the state the responsibility for the country's hardships and economic stagnation during the previous forty years, only 22.4 percent of those surveyed from low socioeconomic groups agreed. Zuleta Puceiro notes "a growing resistance to privatization in circles where the objective chances for achieving relative economic security are slight."²⁵ Neither is the association between state intervention and inflation very clear to the public; this latter aspect appears to be more connected, rather, to the "size" of the state. As for the question of identifying the principal factors responsible for the economic crisis, "inflation" reaches percentages much higher than those of "state intervention" and somewhat above the "size of the state."²⁶ The association made in neoliberal preaching between state intervention and inflation is not shared by the public, or not understood.

The role that is hoped for from the state goes greatly beyond that assigned by the neoconservatives. While concern with inflation clearly follows that for price increases, "unemployment" is mentioned by a significant percentage of the sample as one of the most important problems (not at a personal level but nationally). At

the same time, "almost 40 percent consider it necessary to speed up the privatizations . . . (but prefer) greater state control over the financial sector . . . to reduce public spending and improve tax collection . . . (as well as) to establish price controls." Other surveys provide additional support for the proposition that public preferences were diverse and present views that differ from those of neoliberalism. Surveys in the last three months of 1990 among the middle and upper classes (by Edgardo Carterberg and Associates) suggest that the middle class gave priority to "jobs and wages" among issues that the government's economic program ought to concern itself with, and also expressed somewhat more skeptical support for the privatizations.²⁷ At any rate, the priorities of the public fluctuated: two opinion surveys taken in mid-1991 (Lynch,

Menéndez and Nivel; Mora y Araujo and Associates) indicate that the "lack of jobs," "corruption," and "low wages" were greater concerns than inflation. 28

Following the elections of September 1991, many surveys indicated that the issue people believed had been handled best by the government was control of inflation (it received a 68 percent favorable rating). It was to this issue that the government, not surprisingly, largely owed its popularity. But negative opinions predominated regarding the handling of the cost of public services and the distribution of resources; and the administration was given low marks with respect to wages, crime, corruption, social welfare programs, public health, and education. The problem considered to have been handled worst by the government was unemployment (rated 63 percent unfavorable). Among the issues about which the public expressed a belief that government had to be more attentive were "support for national industry" (83 percent were of the opinion that the government should do more) and protection of the environment (82 percent).²⁹

According to the Zuleta Puceiro survey of December 1990, the majority took for granted that the principal causes of the country's problems were of a political or sociocultural nature. They attributed them to the fact that "the political and economic groups could not reconcile their interests" or to the "lack of interest in working efficiently and responsibly." Only a minority attributed them to causes such as "the intervention of the state in the economy." This kind of explanation takes precedence over either a conservative or populist diagnosis, the populist explanation including such things as the foreign debt and dependency. Such replies indicate at the

same time a strong concern about social unrest and social or political conflict as a precipitant to economic chaos, and a corresponding demand on the part of society for establishing a consensus for (or in its absence, for governmental authority to define) a course of action. This also seems to be linked to the widespread and strong support for business to play a leadership role, although its support is not without some ambiguities. In contrast to the perception of the bloated state as "an obstacle to production due to the existence of legal and bureaucratic impediments," there is widespread appreciation for "the private sector."³⁰

The prestige of business, especially of the agricultural sector, displayed in many public opinion surveys contrasts sharply with the standing of the country's various social sectors (see Table 2).

Table 2. Credibility of Groups and Institutions
Percentage of Favorable Opinion

Ranching/agriculture	89%
Journalists	83%
Industrialists	78%
Store owners	74%
Judges	70%
Bankers	65%
Bishops/priests	64%
Political parties	60%
Military	42%
Union leaders	27%

Source: *Situación Latinoamérica* no.7 (March 1992) and no. 9 (June 1992); Mora y Araujo, Noguera and Associates, Capital and Provinces.

This prestige, however, seems to be due chiefly to a kind of attitude of resignation that consists of granting public power to those who exercise "real power," in the belief that only in that manner can the country find its way. One indication that fear coexists with this positive estimation of business is that, on the other hand, public opinion tended to consider, particularly during the first period of the administration and in tune with the "strategic alliance" with Bunge y Born, that "the great companies . . . because of their economic power and concern for rationalization and productivity . . . are the only ones capable of taking the country forward." 31 On the other hand, public opinion did not fail to perceive the government's strategy to be a result of "an order imposed by the powerful that they are nevertheless prepared to respect if entrepreneurial success is transferred to the government, (despite which) . . . public opinion fears the establishment of a

corporate power which governs in accordance to its own interests." The marked fear that accompanied the disposition to accept the leadership of business interests is found in other surveys. Zuleta Puceiro notes that "the majority of Argentines are convinced that the present economic and political situation will benefit only the local and foreign big shots and will hurt the interests of the less privileged."³²

In sum, this ambivalent support seems to be the product of the perception that the participation of the country's dominant economic groups in the government's political leadership was unavoidable to the extent that they were the only ones capable of giving the country a general direction (inasmuch as they showed themselves capable of obstructing any direction that ignored their demands). Regardless of any ultimately socially inequitable results of this di-

rection, the public far preferred a direction that precluded the reappearance of hyperinflation.

All this leads us to the question of *menemismo*'s political style, a political style that explains, along with the low prestige of politicians, the social tolerance for the extremely independent and decree-prone way (*decisionismo* in Spanish) that the president carried out his reform measures. The evidence for this tolerance is the perceptible gap between the public trust placed in the president and that placed in political institutions. To the extent that politics is perceived as the art of talking instead of acting and politicians as instigators of unnecessary conflict, the image of the government's technocratic and businesslike efficiency, and therefore the administration's antiparty and independent ways, found resonance among the citizenry. Thus, at the same time, we find lagging confidence in the capacity of political institutions to resolve the crisis.

As we have noted, the responses that attribute the crisis to the incapacity of political and social actors to accommodate conflicting interests suggest a strong preoccupation with such clashes and the perception of a causal association with economic chaos. Thus, the public's preferences, in terms of political instruments for solving the crisis, frequently appear inconsistent or contradictory (see Table 3). Both consensus and leadership are demanded because both are opposed to a situation characterized by conflict and the absence of rules, something that society wants to avoid.

Table 3. Solutions to the Crisis (Zuleta Puceiro, 1990)

<i>December 1989 Survey</i>			
<i>Among</i>	<i>Among</i>	<i>Among</i>	<i>Among</i>

	<i>Low- Income Groups</i>	<i>Middle- Income Groups</i>	<i>High- Income Groups</i>	<i>Total Population</i>
Control public spending	47.0%	56.4%	70.9%	53.5%
Privatization	34.9%	46.1%	49.2%	41.0%
Social harmony	39.7%	28.4%	34.4%	34.6%
Tax reform	29.0%	27.5%	28.7%	28.4%

Menem, as is well known, exploited the anti-status quo political biases of the public to legitimize the exclusion of the congress and his own party in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the antipolitical discourse tends to conflict with other long-term tendencies toward change in the strengthening of formal democracy. This conflict can better be seen if the nuances involved in the negative evaluation of politics and politicians expressed in public opinion are taken into account.

The discrediting of politics and the political parties must be understood in all of its complexity. Popular belief holds that the parties are exclusively concerned with the political game and prone to factionalism, and that politicians are people inherently corrupt-a feeling that has, for diverse reasons, grown stronger in recent years. However, the available information suggests the necessity of putting the depth of the public's antipolitical feelings into perspective. For Zuleta Puceiro (1990), for example, the congress (without forgetting that the congress is not the same as the political parties) enjoys a high degree of public esteem when compared with other institutions and groups, regardless of the loss of confidence in its ability to put an end to the crisis. Moreover, the public prestige of political institutions has been much higher than that of politicians.

As we have seen, the public's support for the president's circumvention of institutional procedures was very high. In an initial and prolonged stage, public confidence, although quite erratic, resided in the figure of the president and not the institutions. It was a stage in which, in fact, the necessary degree of autonomy to carry out the reformist task was concentrated in a personal way in the president rather than the government. The support of the public was centered on Menem, and the government's only source of strength was the inherent legitimacy and reformist will of the president. Nevertheless, in a second stage, immediately after establishment of the Convertibility Plan, the situation was partially reversed. ³³ To the same extent that the government and the state have acquired a greater degree of autonomy, public opinion has taken note of the change and redefined its preferences, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Positive Image of the Government

	<i>August</i> <i>1991</i>	<i>October</i> <i>1991</i>	<i>December</i> <i>1991</i>	<i>February</i> <i>1992</i>
Menem	53%	47%	60%	54%
Administration	62%	51%	68%	52%
Economic plan	62%	51%	68%	52%
Foreign relations	51%	51%	57%	52%

Source: *Situación Latinoamericana*, no. 8 (April 1992); Mora y Araujo, Noguera and Associates.

The people's positive estimation of the institutions increases whenever that of the personal leadership of the president begins to decrease. In mid crisis, and with the sensation of "Lebanonization" and the breakdown of all social discipline (including lootings and

hyperinflation), the absence of the institutional capacity to reestablish order gave rise to the acceptance of *decisionismo*. This stage having been overcome, the demand for order was tied to a more institutionalized system, and Menem's *decisionismo* began to be perceived as harmful. In other words, Menem's behavior was initially valued because of the absence of order; later, its continuation could begin to be perceived as the continuation of the absence of order. Even more so when, the crisis having passed, the conviction prevailed that Menem's behavior was based on an appetite for power and not the imperatives of the reform process. This feeling was buttressed by the president's attempt to amend the constitution to allow for his own re-election. His continuation in power, in this way, might be perceived not within the framework of a relevant debate regarding the most appropriate means for consolidating structural reforms but as a pernicious prolongation of the president's *decisionismo* and lack of respect for legal norms.

Unlike the post-Austral period, when, following stabilization, society returned rapidly to the "old" demands of immediate concern (jobs, wages, and economic growth), the stabilization created by the Convertibility Plan has given rise to a much wider margin of maneuver, thanks to more moderate demands and weaker corporate interests. In exchange, it has unleashed demands of another nature: against corruption and for the effectiveness and responsibility of politicians, for respect for institutions and the rule of law, and for civil rights (for example, opposition to censorship). This helps to complicate matters for *menemismo*, inasmuch as the economic accomplishments positively valued tend to be perceived as something that must be protected from Menem himself. Accusations of corruption hound the administration. Their spread

certainly has a variety of causes. One of them, however, rests on the hasty fashion, under circumstances already analyzed, with which the reform program was carried out, especially the privatizations. In many cases, their implementation suffered from so many faulty procedures that indignant protests against abuses of power, corruption, arrogance, irresponsibility, and brazenness abounded. 34

All of this contributed to flagging support for the reform program, but during the emergency period public displeasure was focused on its execution and did not undermine faith in the necessity for the privatizations. In fact, the corruption that had cropped up seemed to strengthen this consensus of "escape to the future"; every time the criticisms appeared, the president profited from this persuasive argument that corruption made privatization urgent,

being the only way to get to the root of the problem. The negative effects on public opinion, however, have turned out to be more lasting, in the sense that the balanced budget, privatizations, and other components of the reform program have been achieved without the government's being able to dispel the widespread doubts about whether corruption is inherent in its way of conducting affairs. A part of public opinion perceives the corruption that surrounded the sale of state companies not as a contingency of the transaction but as its very purpose.

This is related to a third element of public opinion, regarding the concrete results of the structural reforms. On the one hand, public assessment of those structural reforms, especially by the middle and lower classes, tended to be closely tied to their results. This, as we have seen, results from the fact that they did not adhere to the reform program because of deep-seated convictions regarding the free market but because of favorable expectations whose consolidation depended precisely on concrete results. Thus, the middle class perceives the present situation as

"deceptive . . . (since) it hides the reality of a country for a privileged minority in which corruption and shady deals are the rule," 35 And such beliefs find support in the monopolistic character, virtually bereft of public control, of the most important privatizations. It is not surprising, therefore, that privatizing sentiments suffered an erosion as a result of being characterized as "a fad," or as "wasteful," leading to "cutthroat competition" when referring to the free market. The distinctions of public-political interest versus private-company selfinterest appear undifferentiated, and the privatizations are associated with political

interests and corruption, and deregulation with a fad tending to protect sectoral interests.³⁶

On the other hand, the government justified the reforms as necessary in order to free the state from the burdensome load of economic interventionism, so as to improve its institutional and financial capabilities and to provide the essential public services such as education, health care, welfare, defense, and justice. With the essential structural changes consummated, these promises remain to be fulfilled, and it is not clear that the necessary means for delivering them can be obtained in the short term. The conflicts that are posed in the educational and welfare systems, for example, are probably contributing to a deepening of the skepticism about the model implied by *menemista* discourse (by casting doubts on the viability of the model to provide those essential public services), and this attitude extends not only to government performance but

also, at a much deeper level, to the state's proper role, which once again has come under discussion.

Finally, some of the central characteristics of the reform process especially affect the commitment of that sector of society whose support was expressed more as a kind of resignation. The problem is that the government, understandably, found itself obliged to convert stability into the cornerstone of its entire political and economic edifice. That resulted in the straitjacket that constitutes the Law of Convertibility. But the same success of convertibility places the government in a new political dilemma, since the more credible this policy is (and the government needs this confidence), the less credible is the official argument that giving in to social pressures and demands would raise the threat of the "return to the abyss of hyperinflation." It is stabilization itself that weakens, after a period of time, the high value placed on stability, and this concern finds an environment much more competitive in the public's priorities. 37 In summary, in the concrete results of the reforms carried out under the imperative of imminent financial collapse and a pronounced credibility crisis lie latent weaknesses that may undermine public confidence in the justifications that accompany the reform process. The heterogeneous consensus of "escape to the future" displays an ephemeral character and tends to vanish.

President Menem himself repeatedly used public backing for the reforms as a tool to isolate the Justicialist Party or to demand that it respect his decisions. It goes without saying, however, that the limitations for translating a cautious and conditional societal backing on the part of the more independent electorate into permanent political loyalties would oblige him to look once again

to the party at the moment of submitting his administration to the popular vote. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss the durability of *menemismo* in the Peronist Party.

Before venturing into the uncertain terrain of these conjectures, it is necessary to return to the analysis of *menemismo* as a politicalideological maneuver, ignoring for the moment the conditions that explain its rise. Looked at from that angle, *menemismo* turns out to be both conceptually and symbolically flimsy. Its doctrinalideological qua Peronist discourse vacuity can be perceived in the attempts at formulating "doctrinal modernization." For example, an article by the economist Eduardo Curia, then an important government official, proposes to characterize the administration ideologically as one putting into practice "a national version of the social market economy . . . the probable doctrinal projection of

justicialismo." Within this referential framework, Curia also has noted that "Müller-Armack . . . reconciled liberty in the market with social redress, causing two elements to converge: the competitive market as the basic arbiter of resources and the selective participation of government in the economy. . . . The state participates in social transactions, generally orienting the economy and practicing selective inducements. It is a question of neutralizing anti-market interventions, though the pro-market interventions are legitimate, those that establish a general framework and those that help to create and strengthen new markets." 38

This formulation does not eliminate all state intervention in the economy, but limits it exclusively to the providing of public services, mindful of distributive considerations, and to guaranteeing the smooth working of the market. As can be seen, a subject of vital importance, that of state interventions directed toward correcting the failures of the market, is more circumscribed. The role of the state as an agent of development, instead of being redefined in harmony with a more competitive capitalist economy, has been greatly reduced.

This is not the place to discuss the validity of the proposal nor to contrast it with the policies effectively carried out under the present administration since 1989. Rather, I would submit the following argument for consideration: that it is doubtful whether Peronism as it is presently constituted will completely and permanently identify with this direction or that it will reconstruct its identity and its doctrinal-ideological postulates solely in these terms. Certainly the model of state intervention in which Peronism, with its new

internal, more homogeneous composition, can recognize itself, will display nuances and tensions among different positions, and undoubtedly this will be one of them. At any rate, Curia's formulation turns out to be relatively balanced if the positions of the president are taken into account. Menem has declared on repeated occasions that "there is no more important revolution in our time than to return to the State its role in order for it to assume its responsibilities of providing justice, education, health, welfare, security and defense."³⁹ In other words, in accordance with conservative ideas, the state is to be responsible only for public services.

At the beginning of March 1991 the president announced a doctrinal modernization of Peronism. The desire to elaborate a founding speech containing those modernizing elements, a new synthesis that would reflect the internal tensions that are running through

contemporary Peronism, seems contradictory. Indeed, nothing gives the impression that these were the president's true intentions. Rather, Menem needed to strengthen the party's flagging support a few days after the launching of the Convertibility Plan.⁴⁰ So the message was, in reality, noteworthy for its vagueness and for the omission of controversial subjects. Pulled between the necessity of defending the government's direction as the only one possible and that of putting it within a Peronist tradition, if what we are dealing with is a proposal in doctrinal terms, then Menem's words revealed more an ideological hollowness.

Nevertheless, to take it seriously as a doctrinal modernization would not be fair. Posing in a generic way the necessity of modernization, Menem defended, without so defining it, the so-called popular market economy. Yet nothing is found that goes beyond certain woolly ideas: "Argentina's decay is the work of the public sector and the private sector because to believe otherwise would be to fall into a crude Manichaeism that considers everything from the state perverse and everything from the private divine. I do not believe in either privatism or statism, I believe in Argentinism."

At the end of 1991, Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo declared, "I am completely skeptical of those economists who devote themselves to making predictions about determined relative prices or industrial conditions. . . . The only economists in a position to say how the relative price of certain goods is going to evolve, in relation to the costs, the perspectives that exist in foreign markets, the kind of industry that should be developed, are not economists but businessmen."⁴¹

The possibility that Cavallo believed these affirmations literally is almost nil, as is the possibility that he is unaware of any successful examples of state-directed industrial models. But Cavallo preferred to focus on that which Argentina lacks and cannot obtain in the short term, since the precondition of industrial planning that promises greater competitiveness a competent bureaucracy and sufficient state autonomy from sectoral pressures to design and implement policies and to stick to them over time is not only unnecessary but harmful. At the same time, *menemismo* cannot present itself as a force with national roots. In discussing the origins of Thatcherism, it has been said that it was "born out of a growing sense of despair, reflecting the experience of a generation of apparent national decline. That sense of despair was often focused on the economic sphere, because relative economic decline was the

most obvious aspect of national decline." For that reason, the prime minister could appeal to national traditions: "Hers-and her country's are the traditions of economic liberalism, of the minimal state as opposed to the active Colbertian state." 42

Like Thatcherism, *menemismo* imagined a call to the people in order to overcome decline. But this had to be created within the narrow framework of the neoliberal formula of austerity and reform of the state. As we have seen, this implied, far from a faithfulness to national traditions, a sharp rupture with the past and with popular perceptions of the past. The discursive and symbolic elements around which the Menem administration was organized scorned the traditions and national popular myths that, although extremely eroded and disarticulated, had not been replaced by others. *Menemismo* unquestionably could not be taken as a serious attempt at substitution, and its roots are, quite simply, rootless.

Public opinion polls offer information that provides an empirical base that supports my doubts about *menemismo*, with evidence of a breach between the president's ideological about-face and the changes in the direction in conventional Peronist ideology.

According to Zuleta Puceiro (1990), for example, during a period considered in this essay (July 1989 to March 1990), Peronist voters "constituted the most critical faction" and were the bearers of the most markedly low expectations: More than 60 percent believed that the situation would get worse or would remain the same, and the worry over unemployment occupied a top priority.⁴³

The same poll revealed that the support for protectionist measures in matters of trade was also very strong, with 4.6 percent considering such measures as positive and only 11.6 percent as

negative. This attitude starkly divided Peronists and Radicals from the center-right voters in the UCD. Support for the removal of price controls, which had an overall 40.6 percent approval rating, was low in the case of the Peronists, with 38.1 percent in favor. Finally, the support for Menem's private sector-oriented policies was lower among the Peronist electorate than the UCD, especially in Greater Buenos Aires (see Table 5).

Table 5. Economic Policy Evaluation (Based on 1,200 Cases)

	<i>UCR</i>	<i>PJ</i>	<i>UCD</i>
Positive	7.1%	18.1%	24.9%
Neutral	21.6%	22.7%	32.6%
Negative	70.7%	58.3%	41.5%

Source: Enrique Zuleta Puceiro Poll, December 1989.

It is not surprising that the reasons given for the country's crisis revealed a strong party bias and that the *menemista* message found resonance among members of the Radical Party and the UCD; attributing the crisis to "populist policies" was a majority sentiment among those two parties while very much a minority one among the Peronists (for whom "the lack of political consensus" was the most common explanation). It can be gathered from this that the antistatist and "revisionist" message of the president seemed to have fallen on deaf ears, at least as far as Menem's own constituency is concerned. If added to other concerns that also show a strong party bias-such as the demand for agreement and conciliation (in contrast to the squabbling of politicians) and the refusal to attribute the crisis to the state-it can be concluded that the backing that Menem has among Peronists is based on the repudiation of traditional politics, and much less so on "antistatism."

Earlier, an attempt was made to explain that *menemismo* is the continuation and catalyst of a process of transformation within Peronism, compelled above all by the changes first undertaken by the *renovadores*. But at the same time, it can be argued that the discursive and symbolic expressions of *menemismo* imply a break with the Peronist political self-image of representing the popular sectors with a social base in the poorest segments of Argentine society. This represents a strong element of discontinuity with the previous transformations experienced by Peronism, an undisguised break with the direction established by the *renovadores*, who had (at least during their opposition to the Alfonsín government) remained faithful to traditional Peronist political imagery.

With Menem frantically devoted to efforts at strengthening his government and increasing its credibility, Peronism as a home for the less privileged sectors of Argentine society is an idea that has been forgotten. Many of the efforts intended to remedy the credibility crisis brought together very expressive elements in political imagery that implied a new relationship between the political system and the popular sectors, the latter now expected to do little more than keep quiet and obey. Thus it is not surprising that in the midst of such unprecedented change, *menemismo* should be interpreted as a break with post-1955 Peronist traditions. Yet the present identity crisis is in reality more complex, as the acceptance of a neoliberal ideology inherently assumes the formation of social adversaries that are found within the ranks of Peronism. The problem that is posed, therefore, is that of the representation of the popular sectors in Argentina.

Let us imagine in this problem two scenarios that have in common the already consummated transformations in the economy and the Argentine state that have taken place under *menemismo*. In the first, the popular sectors would have become abidingly poor and Peronism would continue to express their concerns. The unresolved tension between autonomous and heteronomous popular tendencies that Peronism as a populist phenomenon entailed would have been resolved in favor of a fate as a *neoperonismo*, a popular conservatism that, after all, always was one of the facets of this political actor.⁴⁴ This tendency is not presently expressed in *menemismo*, but such an outcome would not in itself definitively end the future political career of the president. It is not impossible that Peronism could retain its constituency by appealing to a "moral and national rebirth." It is not so clear, however, that Menem can extricate himself from the policies that were embraced with a convert's fanaticism and unload the burden of having been guilty of some degree of frivolity, corruption, and insensitivity to social problems. When everything is said and done, this conservative reorientation perhaps expresses the Menem that might have been.

The second scenario assumes the recuperation of a certain popular capacity to question the new structures of power, a capacity that Peronism would express and one that would bring to light again issues that are presently eclipsed, such as social justice, income distribution, and the role of the state as an agent of development. In this case, the distance between Peronism and *menemismo* is greater and the political future of the president would be even more uncertain. This second scenario, however, is the most appropriate for making the indispensable and pending corrections to the model,

changes necessary to consolidate the structural reforms. It would not imply a return to populism but a new direction that is capable of correcting the most negative traits of the reforms without destroying what has been achieved on the road to establishing a more competitive and stable economy and a less precarious fiscal situation.⁴⁵ In any event, if *menemismo* has contributed to making more remote the danger of Peronism's returning to its former populist tendencies, it is much less certain that it can establish the basis of a new identity.

Notes

1. Manuel Mora y Araujo, "El cuadro político y electoral argentino," mimeo, 1989. For Mora y Araujo, the general trends that, at least since 1983, mark a

profound change in society's perceptions of its problems are the following: a marked increase in "productivist" attitudes (that is, productivity is more highly valued than distribution); an overriding preoccupation with the problem of inflation, which takes priority over social problems such as the lack of work or low wages; the upholding of democracy; a steady loss of confidence in the parties and political leadership; an even more marked loss of confidence in the unions; and finally, the growing predominance of privatizing sentiments.

2. Mora y Araujo, "El cuadro político y electoral argentino."

3. It must be remembered, however, that the triumph of candidates of a conservative stripe in the Radical Party as well as the fact that the provincial parties (in their majority of the center-right) constitute the third electoral force in the country at the national level are indications of the possibilities for a conservative opposition to the Justicialist government in the future.

4. It can be surmised that I do not mean by *menemismo* any galvanizing political force in the present or future around the leadership of Menem himself.

5. Vicente Palermo and Juan Carlos Torre, "A la sombra de la hiperinflación: La política de reformas estructurales en Argentina," mimeo, 1992.

6. It is still unclear whether Menem has gone too far in making necessity and hardship a virtue to extricate himself credibly from *menemismo*. He may well be trapped, and it is now a question of a point of no return. But this is certainly a secondary question that

concerns more the future personal political career of the president than the issues addressed in this chapter.

7. In this section I am synthesizing part of the argument presented in Palermo and Torre "A la sombra de la hiperinflación" (unpublished paper, 1989).

8. The symbolic is important, above all, due to the deterioration in the level of political debate that took place in Argentina, especially after the failure of the economic policies of the military and Alfonsín governments.

9. Admiral Rojas was one of the architects of the coup that overthrew Perón in 1955 and the person most directly responsible for the bloody repression of the Peronist military and civilians in the June 1956 *legalista* uprising.

10. *Página 12*, March 23, 1980.

11. The so-called *renovadores* were a group of reform-minded Peronist politicians who attempted to strengthen the party vis-à-vis other sectors of the Peronist movement and to establish internal democratic procedures such as party caucuses to select candidates. They established their predominance within Peronism with the 1987 elections. Although Menem was originally one of their members, he broke with them and allied with the more traditional sectors of Peronism after those elections.

12. That is the case, for example, of the faction led by the archetypical Peronist political boss Herminio Iglesias, the defeated candidate for the governorship of Buenos Aires province in the 1983 elections.

13. The entry on the scene of the economists brought with it the spread of new ideas; those that, in some way, had been furnished

by the *Austral Plan* rather than any longstanding sympathy for economic liberalism. At odds with Peronist common sense, a certain consensus was timidly growing about the unavoidable necessity of revising the party's economic and statist policies.

14. Ernesto Laclau, *Política e ideología en la teoría marxista: Capitalismo, fascismo, populismo* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1978).

15. This is not to imply that there exist among those individuals any similarities other than the point under discussion here. Saúl Ubaldini was the president of the CGT throughout Alfonsín's government; Aldo Rico was one of the leaders of the fundamentalist *carapintadas* military groups. The dissident

congressmen (*el grupo de los ocho*) represented the opposition to the *meneraista* program from the leftist-democratic current within Peronism, going on to form the FREPASO party, the principal political opposition to Menem in the 1995 elections. FREPASO, however, has jettisoned much of Peronism's populist traditions and, for example, supports market reforms, although it is highly critical of their handling by Menem's government.

16. We should remember, for example, that the breaking away of a sizable group of Peronist intellectuals and their exodus from the party and the movement occurred in 1985 to protest the heresies of the *renovadores*, not of *menemismo*.

17. We can illustrate this point with a single quotation from one of the leading *renovadores*: "I want to express my gratitude to the one who, after Juan Perón, has taught us the most about the necessity of achieving unity within *Justicialismo*. I want to thank Carlos Menem for having made possible maintaining the unity of the Peronist family." Juan Manuel De la Sota, upon announcing his candidacy for the governorship of Córdoba, *Página 12*, October 15, 1989.

18. The warnings of the negotiating wing of the possibility that the opposition forces, for example, would win converts to its protests from the other groups were constant. The proposal by the state workers' union, the ATE, to the UOM to coordinate resistance to the privatizations of the defense industries was an indication that the threat was real.

19. "If I had it my way, I would grant Menem maximum public powers in order to achieve the necessary changes." These are the

words of the vice president of the Peronist congressional bloc to the congressional press corps.

20. The Marcha del Sí was called by sectors of the government even more for the purpose of endowing the reform policies in the economy and the state with an explicit popular endorsement. The social makeup of those in attendance, who largely adhered to the demonstration spontaneously, was very heterogeneous, expressing support all the way from the upper-class sectors traditionally opposed to Peronism to the poorest sectors of greater Buenos Aires.

21. The essential characteristic of this "consensus of escape to the future" is that it was not based on the public's confidence in the future per se but in its desire to get away from the past. The costs of continuing with the reforms were clearly perceived to be lower than those of turning back, since turning back would mean ipso facto a return to hyperinflation.

22. *La Nación*, February 23, 1990.

23. Enrique Zuleta Puceiro notes that the "defensive individualism" that characterizes broad sectors of society make them "relatively little disposed to political commitments or to remain permanently mobilized." Enrique Zuleta Puceiro, "Economic Culture and Political Attitudes under Hyperinflationary Conditions: An Introduction to the Argentine Case," mimeo.

24. The importance of interventionist sentiment is heightened when it is taken into account that the category "regulatory interventionism" consists of being in agreement that "the state ought to regulate the markets through economic and productive activities."

25. The dichotomy of state vs. private sector "affects all socio-

economic sectors and operates with greater clarity in the upper sectors of the population." Andres Fontana "Informe de coyuntura: Aspectos político institucionales," *Situación Latinoamericana*, no. 2 (1989).

26. Based on four hundred samplings in the federal capital (April and September 1988), Zuleta Puceiro survey.

27. *Situación Latinoamericana*, no. 1 (February 1991).

28. Ibid., no. 4 (August 1991).

29. Consultora Graciela Romer; federal capital and greater Buenos Aires, 450 samplings, November 8-13, 1991, in *Situación Latinoamericana*, no. 7, Informe Anual de 1991. One can only assume that these concerns and priorities have become even more pronounced in recent years with an official unemployment rate at the end of 1995 that hovered around 20 percent.

30. Ibid., no. 4 (August 1991); Silvana Noacco, "Análisis de opinión pública," (unpublished paper, Buenos Aires, 1991); Survey of Mora y Araujo Associates: "More than half of the population prefers a private economic model; the most esteemed social groups continue being the productive sectors."

31. Noacco, (1991).

32. Fifty-six percent believe that these policies will hit the small savers and the "little guy" the hardest.

33. The Convertibility Plan has been an integral part of Menem's reform program, an attempt to establish fiscal restraint and put an end to Argentina's inflationary economy by law. The law requires that government expenditure not exceed the total amount of the government's dollar reserves

34. Such was the case of the privatization of ENTel and also that of the private concessions given for the maintenance of the public highways, to name just two of many examples.

35. Noacco (1992).

36. Ibid.

37. A similar effect occurred previously with the *Plan Austral*, but

to a much lesser degree than under Menem.

38. "La economía popular de mercado," *La Nación*, October 11, 1989. Curia was then a presidential economic advisor and his words could only with great difficulty have been published without the president's blessing.

39. Speech at the opening ceremonies of the Livestock, Agriculture and Industry Exposition, *Clarín* (International Edition), August 6-12, 1990.

40. See "Panorama Político," *ibid.*, March 17, 1991.

41. *Ibid.*, December 29, 1991.

42. David Marquand, "The Paradoxes of Thatcherism," in *Thatcherism*, ed. Robert Skidelsky (London: Chatto and Windus, 1988).

43. Twelve hundred samplings, federal capital and greater Buenos Aires, December, 1989.

44. Peronism as a movement, both in its social composition and its behavior, never parted with certain characteristics and dimensions of a popular conservative nature that, indeed, at moments were predominant within it.

45. There are at least three necessary corrections. First of all, in order to legitimize the reforms, a serious effort to consider social policies is required. Second, the role of the state in the new economic model must be redefined, since only with great difficulty can it be imagined that, without it, there are realistic prospects for growth (in fact, it is to be hoped that it may be from some business sectors themselves that the first voices might be raised that the government take seriously into account the weaknesses of the present model for growth). Finally, the process must be

institutionalized. By that I do not mean a constitutional reform but something simpler and more important: the generally exceptional character and *decisionismo* of the reform period must be replaced by a juridical-political framework in which power has more clearly defined limits and its behavior, therefore, is more stable and less arbitrary.

7

Reviewing the Past and Inventing the Present: The Steelworkers of Villa Constitución and *Menemismo*, 1989-1992*

María Cecilia Cangiano

In one way or another the experience of 1975 is influencing us today, whether we admit it or not. It influences some people in one way, and others in another, but it plays a major role.

Testimony of Guillermo Díaz, union militant of the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica of Villa Constitución Union History Workshop, 1991

The difference I find between the 1975 and 1991 conflicts is that the former was fairly politicized; and we did not commit that mistake in this one. The strike that we carried out this time belonged completely to the workers and the people. The first of May when we held one of the mobilizations, Julio Zamora [the main leader of the Movimiento al Socialismo] showed up and the workers did not like it. We did not want the participation of any political groups. It caused some people to leave. But I have no doubt that the government could not act against us because we ourselves did not have any kind of political affiliation. If we had had it, the mobilization would not have been accomplished. Probably the march to the square would have been like the one in 1975 . . . or worse.

Testimony of a steelworker Union History Workshop, 1991

*This chapter is a revised version of a chapter from María Cecilia Cangiano, "What Did It Mean to be Revolutionary: Peronism, Clasismo, and the Steelworkers of Villa Constitución, Argentina, 1945-1995" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1996). Fieldwork research was done with the financial support of the Social Science Research Council between 1990 and 1992.

The 1989 election of the "Peronist" president Carlos Menem marked a turning point in Argentina's recent political and economic history. In spite of the continuities between Peronism and *menemismo*, Menem's orthodox neoliberal policies, so far from the Peronist tradition, seem to have opened the way for what has been characterized as the death of populism. 1 These policies were intended generally to dismantle the welfare state and to open up the economy. Their outcome has been hyperrecession, unemployment, and a more generalized impoverishment.² In the working-class community of Villa Constitución, the site of the private, nationally owned Acíndar steel plant,³ these national transformations have set the stage for major changes in labor relations and union and political practices. The opening up of the economy made Acíndar push for the implementation of a so-called industrial reconversion plan that implied changes in the organization, hiring, and payment of the labor force.⁴

The local Unión Obrera Metalúrgica (UOM), led by nearly the same non-Peronist militants who had led the struggle for democratization of the local union in 1974-75, had to redefine its union and political strategies to confront the material changes the company and the state wanted to impose on this working-class community.⁵ The most important struggle against Menem's neoliberal agenda and labor "flexibilization" emerged between 1990 and 1991. While trying to invent new labor responses at the local level, the steelworkers made a unique effort to create a broader social front against *menemismo*, the so-called Propuesta Política de los Trabajadores. The high point of this struggle was reached in the February-May lockout of 1991, when the company tried to destroy the union and implemented radical organizational

changes. The results were surprising. Although the company was able, at least partially, to implement some changes, the union and the community came out of the conflict stronger than before.

Although the political front failed in the national arena, it set up the bases for the creation of the current national independent Congreso de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA), a parallel national CGT since 1992. This chapter seeks to reconstruct this short and foundational story about the ways in which the local working-class community has responded to political and social changes since the return of democracy and, particularly, to those changes that took place in the first years of Menem's government, between 1989 and 1991.

The subject of workers' responses to *menemismo* has received little attention from scholars. This account will depart from the

dominant literature in two respects. In contrast to those analyses that focus on national union leaders' responses to *menemismo*, underplaying their resistance, the following analysis will broaden this picture, demonstrating not only the existence of resistance by some union leaders and rank-and-file workers, but also analyzing the nature of their response. This reconstruction will explore the steelworkers' ideological discourse and labor and political practices in a broader historical perspective, an approach that contrasts with the dominant literature on this case, which is focused mainly on the local UOM's response to industrial reconversion.⁷ The fact that the current union leadership, elected since the return of democracy, is nearly the same as in the 1970s makes the case an interesting one for analyzing changes and continuities in the ideological discourses and trade union practices of the working class between the 1970s and the 1990s. The chapter will show, first, that workers redefined their current politics based on an analysis of the present adverse power relations, one characterized by the return of formal democracy, the marginal position of the working class in the democratic transition, and the new challenges posed by the more recent process of industrial reconversion and neoliberal hegemony. Second, it will demonstrate that current union strategies were also shaped by the experiences of militancy and repression in the 1970s. If Menem's neoliberal project hoped to break with the past, either with the Peronist populist tradition or with a more painful recent past, the analysis of a concrete working-class struggle, led by an anti-Peronist leadership coming out of that past, would suggest that the contrary can happen, that the past can serve as a point of reference in the building of an opposition to *menemismo*.

As both testimonies in the epigraphs beginning this chapter

suggest, the past hangs over the workers' heads in one way or another. The returned union leaders have reassessed their past experiences of combativeness and repression. In doing so, they have rejected, rescued, and reinterpreted past goals and practices to respond to new social and political challenges. Although at first glance it seems that most of their old combative strategies have been abandoned, the weight of old ideas is striking. Finally, this process of revision of the past and reinvention of the present is not merely the result of the leadership's perception of present social and political changes. It is a product of the ways in which rank-and-file workers, who are predominantly Peronists, recalled that past and have lived the present neoliberal "Peronist" government. In this regard, the traumatic legacy of a combative tradition and past repression,

as well as the persistence of a Peronist identity, have played a key role in current union politics.

In Search of the Past

On December 6, 1982, Alberto Piccinini, the man who had been the leader of the UOM of Villa Constitución in the seventies, reappeared after eight years in prison.⁸ Like a ghost returning from the dead, he showed up at the factory gate, stopped the incoming buses, and convinced workers to join the strike that the national UOM had declared that same day. Piccinini's re-encounter with the workers has become a mythical founding event. It allowed workers to recover their own collective identity, reopening a new cycle of union activity after eight years of repression and fear. Piccinini and a group of old and new militants formed the Agrupación 6 de Diciembre to get the union back.⁹ In 1984, when democracy was re-established, the union was normalized and the Lista Marrón led by Piccinini won with 88 percent of the votes.¹⁰ In 1988 the same group of workers won the union with 71 percent of the votes.¹¹ That year a new group of younger militants, all around thirty years of age, were elected as shop stewards and joined the union. So the 1984 and 1988 union elections allowed the consolidation of an independent union leadership, formed by old and new militants, in the local UOM of Villa Constitución. Although the militants who remained from the pre-coup era were fewer than the new ones, the former had a major influence in shaping current union politics. In this regard, the role played by Alberto Piccinini and Victorio Paulón, the current heads of the union, has been decisive,¹²

During these years, union activists devoted themselves to different tasks. Many of their initial efforts were dedicated toward the

realization of past ideals left unresolved by the 1975 union intervention. In this sense, that past continued in the present, embodied in the realization of concrete achievements. First, they concentrated their efforts on one of their old pet projects: the creation of a brandnew social and medical service provided by the union local.¹³ This involved the opening of an entire building for medical offices, the purchase of medical equipment and ambulances, the hiring of more doctors, and the establishment of new recreational services such as the opening and improvement of the union campgrounds, a vacation colony for workers' families,¹⁴ and better access to UOM hotel services for summer vacations. The most important achievement was the creation of the Mutual Metalúrgica. This credit union, sup-

ported by contributions from workers and their community, allowed the UOM local to provide personal loans, life and car insurance, pharmaceutical services, housing, and food. It was the most graphic evidence of the achievement of union autonomy, an important goal of the local's historic struggle for economic independence from the national UOM. 15

Second, the workers threw themselves into reconstructing and broadening the union's presence and representation within the local working-class community. This implied the construction of stronger shop floor organizations, establishing democratic and open links between the union and the rank and file, and the opening of the union to the whole community. These goals were also related to the most important motivations behind the 1974-75 struggle: the pursuit of a democratic and pluralistic union to satisfy workers' material needs and their desire for respect as part of the construction of a nonpartisan, independent working-class politics.¹⁶ Democratic unionism and ideological pluralism were some of the past goals they re-evaluated in light of present needs. As the current adjunct secretary of the union, Victorio Paulón, stated:

We understand union democracy to mean first a permanent search for a correct policy to satisfy the needs of the exploited. In the second place, the respect for the decision of the majority in general assemblies is the only way to encourage the participation and consciousness of the rank and file. The constant practicing of consultation and deliberation has improved our chances to generate consciousness and to form activists and leaders. . . . We were never apolitical; we always promoted a politics for the working class, but a politics that should be coherent with its own interests, respond to its

needs and allow it to act within the boundaries of a concrete political situation. . . . We never asked a Peronist to abandon his Peronism. . . . We never imposed ideological definitions that went beyond the understanding of the majority. This is an ideological pluralism: It means the acceptance of different ideological beliefs, trying to avoid a division of the working class in its concrete class politics.¹⁷

The quotation reveals another reason for union leaders' emphasis on ideological pluralism. Confronted with a predominantly Peronist working class, non-Peronist leaders have been trying to rally workers around concrete working-class needs, downplaying any kind of political affiliation, as they had also done in the past. Since 1984, democratic unionism and ideological pluralism were achieved through a number of concrete actions. First, union militants created the conditions for a grass-roots process of decision making through general assemblies, daily personal contact among the rank and file, shop floor organizations, and leadership accountability in

a more direct electoral system.¹⁸ Also, the union broadened its bases of representation and incorporated a younger generation of workers as union cadres and activists.¹⁹ Because of the 1975 firings and the construction of a new steel-making plant (*acería*) in 1978, the company hired new workers who had not participated in the 1974-75 struggle. Most of them formed part of a younger generation born in the 1960s, without previous political experience. Union leaders have been particularly concerned with the incorporation of these younger workers, who became part of the union after the 1988 elections. An important facet of the formation of these new cadres was the use of training courses for the new shop stewards. Since 1984, the returned trade union militants had met with former left-wing militants, old and loyal friends, to organize the Centro de Formación Sindical (CEFS). Located in Buenos Aires, this foundation undertook activities such as courses and lectures on union democracy and the implications of ongoing political and economic transformations for workers.²⁰

If the construction of a democratic and pluralist union formed part of the past worker agenda, these goals found new meanings in the present context. Since the return of democracy, union militants have developed new interpretations of the working-class situation and the labor strategies to follow. The context of industrial crisis and unemployment inherited from the military dictatorship created, in their estimation, an adverse balance of power between capital and labor. Thus, the working class was passing through a defensive moment vis-à-vis capital, and therefore their only alternative was to preserve union organization, avoiding easy defeats. Under the new circumstances, the construction of a strong and representative union also found its *raison d'être* in this defensive strategy.²¹ In

spite of certain continuities, this less aggressive labor strategy was an open break with past combative actions:

It is essential to gather strength and avoid defeats; to undertake small struggles and to win them; to guarantee that the enemy, who is in a stronger position than we are, does not destroy us. We have to strengthen and build consciousness to achieve this. We have to fight against those messages creating a feeling of defeat. . . . These messages favor the bosses' power, because they demobilize us. A harmful strategy . . . is an adventurist policy of everything or nothing, of struggling for its own sake and of fighting under any condition. This policy has suicidal consequences because it leads us to defeat and to an even bigger retreat.²²

As the final part of the quotation indicates, previous "all or nothing" strategies have become very dangerous, as they could lead to

the destruction of the union under the existing unequal relations of power. The defensive strategy became apparent in union responses to the social costs brought about by the ongoing process of industrial stagnation and unemployment that began before 1989. During these early years of democratic union life, the local UOM had to cope with increasing reductions of the labor force by Metcon (the Ford auto parts manufacturer), Vilber (a nearby refrigerator factory), and Acíndar. Confronted with Metcon's attempts to reduce the labor force, ²³ the union defended workers' jobs and consolidated union shop floor organizations at that factory. To cope with the closing down of Vilber, the union promoted the organization of its workers in a cooperative and started negotiations to reopen the factory. Finally, it opposed Acíndar's transfer of jobs to other provinces such as San Luis, done to take advantage of a new policy of industrial promotion.²⁴ The Metcon case can be taken as an example of the kind of defensive union strategy pursued since the return of democracy. The union and the workers decided not to provoke a major conflict in their opposition to the layoffs because it could have led to the dismantling of the union and the loss of more jobs.²⁵

During this initial period of democratic union life, the reinstated leadership devoted itself to consolidating the presence and representation of the union in the factory and the community, as well as to satisfying some long- and short-term social needs. While the desire to provide different kinds of local social services was part of the 1970s agenda, the need to cope with the industrial crisis and unemployment became part of the new set of social issues inherited from the military regime's economic policies. The union had to pursue a more moderate labor strategy, forsaking and even

criticizing its past combative responses in order to cope with these new challenges. It is interesting, however, that not all the old goals were discarded. The democratic context and labor's relative weakness, as well as the persistence of a Peronist working-class identity, rescued one old ideal: a democratic, politically pluralist and independent union. This strategy became a fundamental tool with which to confront a more adverse situation, when Acíndar decided to make major changes in the organization of work in 1989.

Flexibilization, Yes, but . . . with Participation

After 1986, Acíndar started to carry out its postponed industrial reconversion with the appointment of a new industrial relations management, the so-called *gerencia participativa*. Internal market

constraints and the opening of external markets made the company aware of the need to overcome the gap between technological innovations and labor organization in order to compete in foreign markets. 26 In spite of its name, the new management started its flexibilization experiments from the top down, disregarding the union. By the beginning of 1989 it had decided to set up the "polyvalent" organization of labor, organizing production around workers' teams, which would be in charge not only of productive tasks but also maintenance and supervisory tasks.²⁷ The steel-making plant became the target of these changes, but several factors blocked their successful implementation, most notably because the changes were accompanied by the firing of supervisors and workers.²⁸

The election of Carlos Menem and his administration's slashing of state industrial subsidies moved the company to undertake changes in more authoritarian and dramatic ways. In June 1990, Acíndar replaced the soft-line management with a hard-line group led by Carlos Roldán, a man well known for his participation in the 1985 Ford conflict and the rationalization and flexibilization of the state-owned airlines, Aerolíneas Argentinas. The new manager issued a public document urging the union to accept the changes in the organization of labor.²⁹

Confronted with this, the union leadership put into practice some ideas they had developed about defensive labor strategies. Since the 1988 elections, union activists had pooled information and discussed international industrial reconversion experiences and their social costs.³⁰ The union responded to Acíndar's document with a counterproposal that summarized their previous goals of

consolidating the union without confrontation. The union suggested the organizational changes be done through mutual agreement and consensus between the company and the union. To achieve this, both parties should create a special technical commission to discuss how the changes would be carried out without social costs. For the union, the "polyvalent" group production should develop a better paid and more skilled labor force, without firings.³¹

The document issued by the union had the same format, point for point, as the company's; but while it replicated the company's discourse, it introduced other issues not found in the original document, such as the union's participation in the reconversion process and workers' benefits. For example, when it referred to workers being in charge of quality control issues, the union emphasized that workers should be trained to understand quality control techniques and, simultaneously, that they should participate actively in their

formulation.³² In so doing the union local challenged the company's discourse, which merely stated that everyone should know quality control techniques beforehand, without any reference to training and participation. More striking is the fact that these ideas about strengthening the union through participation were not coming solely from the union's previous experiences but were also part of a set of ideas underlying new forms of labor organization. In some First World countries, such as France, industrial reconversion was accompanied by an increase in workers' skill and participation in the production process. But Acíndar disregarded those issues. As Marcela Jabbaz has shown, the company's goal was not social modernization but rather a classic rationalization. It wanted to reduce the labor force and to increase worker assignments, lowering their salaries and their union protection. UOM activists challenged this "modernization" project, not only through their defensive strategy but also in the company's own terms, pointing to the lack of positive modernizing benefits.³³ To pressure the company to accept the creation of a technical commission, the union organized a general mobilization in the city on July 26, 1990. This mobilization turned out to be the biggest since the return of democracy, and it achieved its goals.

From July 1990 to March 1991 the union participated, through the technical commission, in the negotiations over organizational changes in the company. This commission had to discuss and negotiate the changes proposed by the company in each department with workers, according to their job classifications, and later discuss the results with company management. The experience of the technical commission, so well reconstructed by Marcela Jabbaz, will not be detailed here. It is important, however, to

emphasize that the commission had the result of defending workers' knowledge and shop floor power vis-à-vis management's intentions to reduce their skill and atomize their capacity to respond. An anecdote can help to show how the technical commission changed power relations in the plant. While the commission's members received information on what was going on within each department and pooled their knowledge, the foremen of each department did not have a deep understanding of the changes. Whenever they met workers, they felt embarrassed about their ignorance and limited power.³⁴ As we will see, the company did not accept this reversal of power and knowledge relations on the shop floor.

To summarize, union responses to industrial reconversion were framed in terms of their pre-existing defensive labor strategy.

Union

activists could not oppose the changes because they knew, in the light of a global transnationalization and industrial reconversion, that those changes were inevitable. Therefore, they decided to negotiate them, participating in the process of change and thereby reinforcing the union's power, in spite of the authoritarian and drastic policies adopted by the company. The workers' previous defensive strategy legitimized this response. Moreover, their right to participate in and profit from labor flexibilization was not legitimized only by the union strategy but also by the nature of the industrial reconversion chosen by the company. Because Acíndar's reconversion was more a rationalization than a social modernization, the workers could challenge the nature of the change by using the very language of industrial reconversion.

The Propuesta Política de los Trabajadores

While workers were negotiating labor flexibilization at the factory level, union leaders pushed for broader political involvement at the national level. Since the return of democracy, Alberto Piccinini had been very active in the human rights movement and in the national struggle for union democratization promoted by the Radical government.³⁵ The rise of *menemismo* pushed the steelworkers' leadership of Villa Constitución to lead a social and political front against Menem from June 1990 to January 1991.³⁶ The history of the front is short but meaningful, because it condenses several important issues related to the ways in which the steelworkers attempted to participate in the political arena, as well as to the front's limitations.

In October 1990 a congress formed by union leaders and delegates from different non-Peronist union locals launched a new political

movement, the Propuesta Política de los Trabajadores (PPT). The key heads of the front were independent union leaders from the Province of Buenos Aires and various provinces of the interior, such as Córdoba, Santa Fe, and Chaco. There were at least three groups: politically independent leftists, such as Piccinini and Carolina Lichter from the Health Service Union of Buenos Aires; those who belonged to the former Radical party faction 29 de Mayo;³⁷ and those who belonged to the Communist Party, such as the militants from the tire, telephone, railroad, and teacher unions of Buenos Aires.³⁸ After its first congress, the PPT structured itself regionally and its participants debated their readings of the current

social and political situation, and the nature of their own political organization.

Two documents summed up the PPT's main propositions. At the international level, PPT activists identified a major change in the process of accumulation of capital, characterized by transnationalization and labor flexibilization and accompanied politically by conservative/neoliberal hegemony. In Argentina, such economic change had also been accompanied by debt, the transference of obsolete technologies, destruction of the welfare state, recession, and unemployment. Politically, the election of Carlos Menem represented the creation of a restricted democracy controlled by a few powerful holding companies. There had been virtually no attempts to develop broad collective responses to the neoliberal hegemony. Unions had been unable to articulate a political opposition. Thus it was necessary to create a new kind of democratic unionism, without exclusions or sectarianism, rooted in the long tradition of popular struggles.³⁹ At the same time, the political crisis of the traditional parties and the left generated the need for the popular sectors to create a new type of political instrument. The marginal position of industrial workers made it necessary to build new alliances with other sectors threatened by the crisis: students, professionals, artists, small businessmen, women, and human rights activists. The new political organization would have to be democratic, open to internal political differences, and without dogmatic and sectarian manipulation by any group. In broad terms, the Propuesta emphasized that it was possible to find other solutions to the crisis of the state, the debt, and the ongoing deterioration of the health and educational systems than the ones proposed by neoliberalism. As ultimate goals, the PPT wanted the

end of any kind of social and economic exploitation and the construction of a popular democracy.⁴⁰

The PPT's political alternative was a clear critique of a dogmatic and vanguard socialist political agenda, and especially of the Argentine left's support for armed struggle, its conception of political organization as an enlightened vanguard, and its tendency to define a priori dogmatic solutions to the crisis of capitalism. The most evident manifestation of this was the PPT's reluctance to define its political ideology as socialist, as was made apparent by its vague name. The party's founders were aware of the need to redefine their own ideology without imposing a priori solutions. These critiques were summarized by Victorio Paulón in one of the PPT's documents:

We do not want a debate centered on abstract principles, we want to build a flexible political instrument that can break with Leninist and populist concepts that emphasize that popular demands should be proposed by a "party" or a centralized organization. Our proposition implies an opening up to creative and autonomous initiatives from our society, without hegemonic leadership. . . . If we had a mechanical, hegemonic concept of the problem, it would be very easy to conclude that the solution to the current Argentine crisis (misery, unemployment, and corruption) is socialism. However, the idea of socialism does not interest the popular sectors. There are different reasons for this. One is especially important: the traditional left's incapacity to elaborate a viable and comprehensive alternative to a crisis that is not simply a proletarian one. 41

Several national and international factors converged in this critical reassessment of the socialist political project. There was the defeat of the 1970s armed utopia, the return and revalorization of democracy, and, above all, the recent crisis of the left after the fall of the Soviet bloc and the failure of the Nicaraguan experience. In the specific case of Argentina, there was another special problem that any alternative to Menem would have to take into account: the strength of the Peronist tradition within the working class. The UOM activists of Villa Constitución were completely aware of the problem of mobilizing a Peronist working class against a "Peronist" government. At the local level, they tried to work this problem out very carefully. The union had a political group that was the link between workers and the PPT. The group gathered workers from different political tendencies, emphasizing mutual ideological respect and their common critiques of the present economic, social, and political crisis.⁴²

The PPT political project was also a result of an analysis of the

current social and political balance of power. The crisis of the traditional political parties and the narrowing of popular democratic political alternatives made them give priority to the building of a grass-roots democratic front. The relative weakness of the working class and the gravity of the social crisis shaped the character of the front. The steelworkers, one of the front's most important promoters, acknowledged that unions had been unable to create a broad-based opposition to Menem's neoliberalism because of their bureaucratization and their marginal position among the popular classes. The solution was to democratize the unions and to establish a front with all the social sectors affected by the crisis.

Although some of these propositions were a complete break with the previous violent, vanguardist, and revolutionary strategies of the left, there were other continuities. The front was resurrect-

ing old traditions about popular political participation. For example, the idea of a working-class struggle independent of political parties was influencing their idea of a grass-roots front. The most symbolic continuity lay in the reassessment of one particular working-class political project: Agustín Tosco's democratic popular front.⁴³ Tosco's democratic front was ahead of its time, when a violent strategy was the norm. It was significant that both PPT congresses ended with collective declarations in the name of Tosco. Thus the steelworkers and the PPT rescued, from the past, notions related to the building of an independent popular and democratic struggle from the bottom up, rejecting those ideas related to the construction of a revolutionary party led by a vanguard and discarding, of course, notions of armed struggle.

The PPT experiment was short-lived. Its failure was a result of its internal ideological conflicts, as well as the tensions between the dynamic of its development and the political conjuncture. The group led by Piccinini, followed mainly by the 29 de Mayo militants, waged an internal ideological debate with those union militants coming from a dogmatically left position. While the former emphasized democratic practices and ideological pluralism, the latter was still thinking in more dogmatic and somewhat sectarian terms.⁴⁴ These internal conflicts, which also have been part of the Brazilian PT's experience, were fatal in the case of the Argentine PPT. By 1991 the PPT had to define its political participation in national elections (congressional and municipal), and Piccinini's group split. The steelworkers did not consider the front to be representative enough to move into the political arena, while the 29 de Mayo needed to participate in the political process to maintain its legal status as a party. The steelworker militants

realized that there were clear tensions between the time needed for the development of a social front and the dynamic of the formal political arena.⁴⁵ The 29 de Mayo split and went on to create a political alliance with other scattered factions of the traditional parties and the left.⁴⁶

The failure of the PPT marked the failure of a political front led by social movements and the beginning of a democratic-left alternative led by middle-class militants and intellectuals. While the independent working class ended up coming together in the 1992 Congreso de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA), a kind of alternative CGT,⁴⁷ different factions of the left and dissident Peronist and Radical militants created diverse electoral fronts. The most recent one, the FREPASO (Frente para el Pais Solidario), displaced the Radical Party as the second political force in the 1995 elections.

Although the CTA supported these fronts and Alberto Piccinini became one of its candidates, 48 the original idea of an independent social front had been subordinated to traditional party politics.⁴⁹

The Acíndar Lockout and the Second *Villazo* (January-April 1991)

Another unexpected local problem limited the steelworker militants' ability to participate in the political arena. By the end of 1990 the experience of the technical commission had prompted the company to take more drastic steps. Between January and March 1991 the company responded by firing and suspending workers, and finally resorting to a lockout, followed by the firing of all unionized workers (around 3,500) on March 21, 1991. The company was hoping to achieve a number of different goals at the same time: to pressure the Menem government regarding its intentions of eliminating state industrial and export subsidies,⁵⁰ to implement the industrial reconversion once and for all, and finally to destroy the union and hire nonunionized workers.

Confronted with a lockout that virtually shut down the factory, union leaders and workers intensified their defensive strategy in two ways. First, they showed themselves open to negotiating with the company-building, at the same time, bonds of solidarity among themselves and with other political actors, unions, and community authorities. Second, while keeping the door open to dialogue with the company, they developed a collective strategy of permanent mobilization of the whole community-women and children included-and solidarity with different political and social sectors. Instead of a factory seizure, they staged a "factory seizure but outside the factory," setting up three tents at the factory gates where each worker with his family kept his mandatory factory shift,

participating in different kinds of collective activities, such as meals and entertainment. Some reference should be made to the role played by women in this conflict. As in the 1974-75 conflict, women mobilized as wives to defend their class interests. They played a key role, participating in the tents and doing their domestic tasks.⁵¹ Their fight was defined in a public speech by Irene García, the wife of a young activist, as a fight "for my husband, for my sons, for my brothers and for you all."⁵² As a result of this conflict, women's status and presence in the union acquired a clearer, more formalized place as *compañeras-esposas metalúrgicas*. Their gender identity was linked to their class identity as wives of steelwork-

ers. A symbol of this was the creation of a *comision de esposas de metalúrgicos* that set up its headquarters in the union after the conflict. This was something that had been difficult to develop previously because the union had always been predominantly a male space. 53

The "seizure of the factory outside the factory" was accompanied by several impressive popular marches from the factory to the center of the city that galvanized the participation not only of nearly the entire community but also of union representatives, the municipal government, and several national congressmen and politicians. This kind of street mobilization followed an old strategy, long present in popular community struggles. But the symbolic meaning of this "seizure" could not have been more different than that of 1974. While the latter had the potential to reverse the control of the means of production, the reproduction of a kind of parallel factory in 1991 reaffirmed workers' needs and desire to maintain their right to work. With the death of populism, their "subversion" lay in their commitment to industrial growth with social opportunities.

The lockout prompted a major revision of union strategy, especially if contrasted with the 1974-75 *Villazo*. My previous analysis has shown that union leaders rescued from the past the construction of an independent democratic union, while changing their old combative strategies to defensive ones under the current unequal relations of power. Since the restoration of democracy, these goals and practices have been legitimized as the continuation and fulfillment of postponed past ideals. But the threat posed by the lockout brought more contrasting images between their combative

past and their present defensive strategy. The lockout revived the tragic and repressive experience of the 1974-75 struggle, legitimizing even more the new defensive strategies. Workers chose to avoid open confrontation, violence, and political ties. As one militant explained, "In the past we opposed, simultaneously, imperialism, the entrepreneurs, the national government, and the national union bureaucracy. Because of this, we were isolated and the relations of power were adverse for the union. Now, the most important goal is to oppose the company. Without giving up our principles, we have to make alliances to turn the balance of power to our advantage."⁵⁴

With regard to political affiliation, we have seen that the union emphasized the nonpartisan character of the union struggle because they needed to rally Peronist workers around common goals once democracy was restored. The lockout made evident that the union should avoid any kind of political affiliation because of the rank

and file's memory of the 1970s, a memory that associated political involvement with repression. Their recollection, paradoxically very similar to the state's official justification for repression in 1975, meant that workers had a traumatic relationship with politics. 55 Because of this, union militants had to avoid any kind of link to politics. As Guillermo Diaz explained, "Faced with the lockout, workers pressured us in the initial mobilizations. And they pressured us a lot. They told us the conflict belonged to them and that they did not want the political parties to be involved, not because they viewed in a negative way the political parties, but because they had the old fear of the infiltration by political organizations in their struggle."56

It was not only the workers' strategies in the second *Villazo* that were clearly different from the first one. Another striking difference was found in the reaction of the Peronist state and the National UOM to the lockout. Acíndar was the only voice who this time dared publicly to associate the workers with subversive ideology,⁵⁷ whereas the UOM and the state sided with labor. Lorenzo Miguel, the same leader of the national UOM who had participated in the 1975 repression of the Villa Constitución rebellion, now publicly supported the local UOM. The reasons for his support were quite clear. Acíndar was trying to bust an important affiliate of the UOM.⁵⁸ The *menemista* state, for its part, did not welcome the aggressive behavior of Acíndar because the company was threatening its neoliberal project in at least two ways. First, it was showing that the implementation of labor flexibilization could have unexpected social costs. For a state that was trying to legitimize its economic plan, Acíndar's actions went too far.⁵⁹ Second, Acíndar was questioning crucial aspects of

Domingo Cavallo's economic plan, particularly the ones related to the ending of state subsidies to business. The reaction of Acíndar shows that some business sectors were ambiguous in their attitude toward a complete opening up of the economy and the retreat of the state, perhaps because they had grown thanks precisely to an unlimited use of the state during the military regime.⁶⁰

The workers' cautious mobilization, together with the pressures of the national UOM and the state, obliged Acíndar to negotiate. On April 9, government representatives, the company, and the UOM reached an agreement. The company compromised and agreed to rescind the firings, offering instead voluntary retirements and promising to incorporate suspended workers as soon as the factory resumed production, as well as to continue discussing the organi-

zational changes with the union. However, in spite of these promises, the very day the agreement was to be signed the company pressured the workers to sign two more documents specifying how their reincorporation was going to be done and obliging them to accept work changes. These last-minute modifications denied the union a role in negotiations on these crucial issues and were considered a betrayal by the workers.⁶¹ On April 21, a final agreement was signed, specifying that the workers had the right to oppose the company's decisions if they did not follow the provisions of the collective bargaining agreements.

The results of the conflict, as we can see, were not clear-cut. On the one hand, the union was able to survive, as well as to legitimize its defensive, independent, and solidarity strategy, achieving unprecedented support. In this regard, union militants and workers and their families vindicated the path followed by their mobilization. It re-established the union as a legitimate power, broadened its bases of support, and above all strengthened class, community, and family ties. It kept alive the basic resources to continue struggling for their social and human rights: their own organization, identity, and solidarity. In this respect, the results satisfied some of the original goals of their defensive strategy.⁶² On the other hand, the results made labor flexibilization a concrete reality. The workers had never opposed it because they knew that it was inevitable. But when they returned to work, they had to face it in a much cruder form of reconversion. The company had already carried out some of the organizational changes, and the workers had lost part of the original control they had had over the production process because the conflict put an end to the experimental technical commission. Although the nature of the

changes are still being negotiated, it is possible to conclude that they have followed Acíndar's original desire for rationalization without modernization.

Conclusion

Recent studies have downplayed unions' opposition to *menemismo*. Seen from the perspective of the national Peronist union leadership, without including rank-and-file points of view, these studies argue that the union leaderships and workers have either been conditioned by their loyalty to Peronism or have adopted some autonomous survival strategies, such as establishing their own businesses, thereby investing, so to speak, in the privatization process. Moreover, these strategies were, the argument goes, not merely

the result of their political loyalties but also a response to the current exhaustion of union economic resources. 63 The case of Villa Constitución provides a more complex picture of leaders' and workers' responses and motivations. First, it suggests the need to do further case studies, focused not only on union leaders but also on the rank and file, in order to understand the nature and degree of workers' acceptance and resistance to *menemismo*. Second, and more important, it suggests that the understanding of those responses has to be framed within the union's history and the leaders' and workers' past experiences and traditions. Lacking any kind of political loyalty to Peronism, these local UOM leaders have adopted strategies for survival intended to reinforce union democracy and to cope with the social costs of neoliberalism, rather than establishing their own private businesses. The role that democratic and politically independent traditions, rooted in a combative past, had in taking precedence over other strategies puts into perspective the weak response of the national Peronist union leadership. These leaders have not merely responded feebly because of their ideological loyalties or lack of resources. The very nature of their strategies tells us a lot about the history and persistence of a bureaucratic union tradition among them.

Notes

1. See Jeremy Adelman, "Post-populist Argentina," *New Left Review* 203 (1994): 65-91.
2. For a detailed analysis of Carlos Menem's neoliberal policies and their social impact see William C. Smith, "Hyperinflation, Macroeconomic Instability, and Neoliberal Restructuring in Democratic Argentina," in *The New Argentine Democracy*, ed.

Edward Epstein (New York: Praeger, 1992). Recent official figures regarding the performance of the economy have confirmed Smith's argument of the recessive effect of the orthodox neoliberal package.

3. Villa Constitución is a factory town of approximately 45,000 inhabitants located between Buenos Aires and Rosario. It was composed originally of three plants: the Acíndar steel plant, built between 1946 and 1951; Acínfer, a producer of iron-melted pieces, built in 1955; and Marathon, a producer of special steels for tools, built in 1961. Acíndar and Marathon still belong to the Acíndar company, but Acínfer was sold to Ford, becoming Metcon (Metalúrgica Constitución) in 1966, Acíndar is today one of the leading private national steel companies and the head of a holding company formed by approximately forty firms. It monopolizes a major part of the domestic steel market, together with Aceros Paraná and Siderca from the Techint economic holding group. Since 1952, the steelworkers have been organized in the local section of the Unión Obrera Metalúrgica, one of the most centralized and strongest of Peronist unions. In 1970 the city had sixteen thousand inhabitants, of whom six thousand were workers—that is, 44 per-

cent of the population. Today the union has approximately four thousand workers-8.1 percent of the population.

4. Although the process of industrial reconversion has involved different kinds of technological, organizational, and social transformations in industrialized and underdeveloped countries since the mid-1970s, it basically has meant the end of the Taylorist system of production. First, it has brought the introduction of sophisticated new computerized and robot technology. Second, it has meant the disappearance of the Taylorist structure of supervision, replaced by a multiple-task labor organization. Each section works as a productive unit in which each worker performs all the different tasks related to maintenance, production, quality control, and supervision. The enrichment of workers' tasks is accompanied by a more skilled technical training, in contrast with the low-skilled Taylorist labor force. Third, these technological and organizational changes have involved the flexibilization of the labor force. At the level of the organization of production, workers do not have fixed individual tasks but form part of mobile and flexible groups of production. In terms of labor stability, salaries, and social benefits, it implies that workers can be hired temporarily, even per diem, with wages adjusted according to company needs and the market situation. The company's indemnization and employer contributions would be eliminated. The final consequence of this would be the dismantling of state and union power to mediate labor relations. See Benjamin Coriat, *El taller y el cronómetro* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1986); and Robert Boyer, *La flexibilidad del trabajo en Europa* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo, 1989). Although the research on how these changes developed in Argentina is still just beginning, for a broad

characterization see Jorge Walter, "Modalidades de racionalización en las empresas argentinas: Del ajuste a las nuevas formas de organización del trabajo," in *Sociología del Trabajo*, no. 13, (Fall 1991).

5. Under the third Peronist presidency (1973-1976) these steelworkers mobilized against the Peronist union bureaucracy to democratize their local union. The factory seizure and general strike, called the *Villazo*, of March 1974 allowed a group of young non-Peronist militants led by Alberto Piccinini to gain control of the union through democratic elections at the end of that year. However, the democratic experiment was short-lived. In March 1975 the state intervened, supported by the company and the national UOM, claiming the existence of a "subversive menace." In spite of workers' resistance, the union leaders were imprisoned and state repression continued systematically after the military coup of 1976. For a detailed analysis of the conflict see Maria Cecilia Cangiano, "What Did It Mean to be Revolutionary: Peronism, Clasismo, and the Steelworkers of Villa Constitución, Argentina, 1945-1995," (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1996, chapters 5-7).

6. See Carlos Acuña, "Politics and Economics in the Argentina of the Nineties, (Or, Why the Future No Longer is What It Used to Be)," in *Democracy, Markets and Structural Reform in Latin America*, ed. William Smith, Carlos Acuña, and E. Gamarra (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993); Vicente Palermo, "Apoyos y Resistencias" (manuscript, Buenos Aires, 1993); and María Victoria Murrillo, "Union Response to Economic Reform in Argentina," (manuscript, Cambridge, MA, 1994)

7. See E. Basualdo, J. Lozano, and C. Fuks, "El conflicto de Villa Constitución," (Buenos Aires: IDEP, 1991); A. Elías, *Las Lecciones*

del caso Acíndar, (Rosario: UNR Editora, 1991); Marcela Jabbaz, "Modernización social o flexibilización salarial?" (manuscript, Buenos Aires, 1992); Hector Angélico, D. Fernández, and Julio Testa, *Reconversión y relaciones laborales: La Lógica de los actores*

(Buenos Aires: Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 1992); and Héctor Palomino and Marta Novick, "Reestructuración productiva y reforma laboral: Estrategia empresarial y respuesta sindical frente a la reestructuración económica: Estudio de un caso," (manuscript, Buenos Aires, 1992).

8. Alberto Piccinini was imprisoned from March 20, 1975, to March 1981. He was sent, along with the rest of the union leadership, to the Santa Fé Coronda prison. After one month there, they spent four years and seven months in the Rawson prison, Chubut province. Piccinini was later transferred to the Caseros prison in Buenos Aires where he remained until 1980, when he was released under surveillance. He was paroled in March 1981. After he was released, he worked in an insurance company, finding himself unable to get a job as a steelworker. Interviews with Alberto Piccinini, April 1992 and June 1993.

9. The formation of the *Agrupación* was possible because Piccinini was able to get a new job in early 1983 at a small metallurgical workshop in Alcorta-the Borrassala workshop, which belonged to the family of President Raúl Alfonsín's minister of the interior, Raúl Borrás. By October he also got his union membership to the UOM back. The group was formed by some workers who were loyal to Piccinini in the 1970s, such as Luis Lezcano and Mario Aragón, and some younger workers, such as Elvio Nardoni (Metcon). Interviews with Pedro Parada and Ricardo Saavedra, 1991, and Alberto Piccinini, March 1992.

10. The Lista Marrón slate that won the elections was formed mainly by workers closely linked to Piccinini, people such as Mario Aragón, Dante Manzano, Victorio Paulón, Leonardo

Lezcano, Pedro Parada, and Elvio Nardoni, and Peronist workers such as Luis Ramírez and Miguel Lezcano. Interviews with Pedro Parada and Ricardo Saavedra, 1991.

11. These elections were preceded by the 1987 national elections, in which the Peronists defeated the Radicals. This led the Peronist militants who formed the previous slate to organize their own list, the Lista Verde, supported by the Peronist Party. In addition, the union adjunct secretary, Mario Aragón, was ousted, accused of "betrayal" by the workers. The 1988 Lista Marrón slate was formed by Piccinini, Victorio Paulón, Pedro Parada, Elvio Nardoni, Dante Manzano, Luis Lezcano, Juan Luis Febre, Oscar Macedo, and Ricardo Saavedra. Fliers of the Lista Marrón and Verde, 1988, and interviews with Pedro Parada and Ricardo Saavedra, 1991.

12. Fieldwork observations, 1990-1992.

13. "Rendición de cuentas a los compañeros," union bulletin, 1988, p. 2.

14. The "camping" is a weekend house located in the banks of the Paraná River and the Arroyo del Medio, which separates Buenos Aires and Santa Fe provinces. It was originally the house of a member of the company management who was killed by the guerrillas in 1975. The house and the land were bought by the UOM overseer during the military dictatorship. When the 1970s group of militants returned, they transformed it into a center for sport and leisure activities for all the workers' families.

15. According to their local bulletin, since 1986 the Mutual had provided more than eighteen hundred personal loans. Some five hundred car insurance policies and three thousand life insurance policies have been obtained thanks to the Mutual. It also helped around twenty-four hundred families cover their medical

prescription needs. Finally, it bought some land on which to construct houses for nearly four hundred workers, Rendición de Cuentas." Union bulletin, Villa Constitución Steelworkers, 1988. While I was doing my fieldwork in 1990, the credit union had already started the building of its own offices, as the bulletin had promised two years before.

16. See María Cecilia Cangiano, "What Did It Mean to be Revolutionary? The Languages of Class of the Metallurgical Working-class Community of Villa Constitución, 1969-76," paper presented at the Labor Congress, Duke University, May 1995.

17. Victorio Paulón, "Democracia y Pluralismo" in *Luchas obreras argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Experiencia, 1985). Union fliers, as well as leaders' public speeches and interviews, constantly emphasized the democratic nature of the union, as well as its political independence to pursue a working-class politics without internal partisan political divisions. See, for example, "Hay gente que tiene miedo de revalidar títulos," interview with Alberto Piccinini, *SOMOS*, no. 224, March 2, 1984; and "Rendición de cuentas."

18. Since the 1988 election, union leaders and shop floor stewards have been elected directly. Interviews with Pedro Parada and Ricardo Saavedra, 1991.

19. Other elements were the incorporation of the workers of several small metallurgical workshops and outside contractors to the UOM, and the opening of the union building to monthly senior workers' meetings. See "Rendicion de Cuentas." Union bulletin, Villa Constitución Steelworkers, 1988, p. 17.

20. After Piccinini was released from prison, he had the opportunity to travel around Europe, establishing contacts with different kinds of socialist union organizations and parties. He also met with Argentine political exiles and militants he had known in the 1970s. Out of these re-encounters came the idea not only to recover the union but also to form the CEFS. The contacts with

Social Democrat union activists helped him to finance the project. The financial support of the CEFS came, in part, from the Foundation Friedrich Ebert, whose money, in turn, comes from the German Social Democratic Party.

21. Interviews with Alberto Piccinini, Victorio Paulón, and Guillermo Díaz, 1991-92; and "Rendición de cuentas."

22. "Rendicion de cuentas." Union bulletin, Villa Constitución Steelworkers, 1988, p. 14.

23. Metcon is the plant that has suffered the biggest reduction of its labor force, particularly since the re-establishment of democracy. Between 1975 and 1985, the number of workers fell from 1,800 to 1,100. Afterward, it fell as low as 450. Today the plant has 600 workers. Interview with Victorio Paulón, 1992.

24. See "Rendicion de cuentas." Union bulletin, Villa Constitución Steelworkers, 1988, pp. 15-16. Personal interviews with Alberto Piccinni, Victorio Paulón, and Guillermo Díaz (Villa Constitución, 1991-92).

25. Another explanation for their soft attitude toward Metcon lies in the fact that this factory belongs to Ford. In 1985 there was a factory seizure of the Ford plant in Pacheco, near Buenos Aires, that ended with a military occupation of the plant, the suspension of union negotiations, and the dismantling of shop floor organizations. The UOM was aware that an aggressive union strategy could lead to a similar end. This softer strategy was criticized mainly by the groups of young militants with links to the MAS and the *Peronismo de Base*, which characterized the union as a yellow union.

26. During the military regime, Acíndar developed three strategies to reduce costs and increase production. First, it undertook a major

technological overhaul with the building of a steel-making plant (*Acería*) between 1978 and 1982, taking advantage of the opening up of the country by the military government to needed technology. The steel-making plant allowed the company to integrate the production process fully, producing the slabs and billets from the mineral ore through the most advanced technological system of direct reduction. The project approved originally by the minister of economy, Celestino Rodríguez, in 1975,

was put into practice thanks to state subsidies during the military regime. This integration had as a major objective to monopolize the domestic market. In spite of the fact that that market started to shrink, Acíndar was able to expand its market share after the construction of the *Acería* because it merged with other steel companies, closing some plants. In 1981 Acíndar merged with the Gurmendi group and as a result of this, both firms closed five factories. Acíndar reduced the number of its plants to two: the Villa Constitución plant (nonrolled steels) and the La Matanza plant (special steels) near Buenos Aires. Finally, it transferred part of the Villa Constitución plant to the province of San Luis, helped by the "industrial promotion" legislation. Between 1978 and 1987, the technological changes were not accompanied by changes in the organization of the workforce because the company kept a Taylorist organization of labor. The only change was the incorporation of new workers outside the collective bargaining agreements. See Marcela Jabbaz, "Modernización social o flexibilización salarial?" pp. 17-32.

27. The top-down strategies for carrying out industrial reconversion developed by Acíndar have to be understood in the context of the company's long-term managerial and labor practices. As Hector Palomino and Marta Novick have suggested, Acindar's management practices can be characterized as autocratic-that is to say, hierarchical, centralized, paternalistic, and authoritarian. As a family-owned company that belonged to the Acevedos, one of the country's traditional oligarchical families, the company's internal power structure followed the family model. Decisions were in the hands of an elite management group, mainly the Acevedo family members, while middle- and low-rank management had to follow

orders. With regard to workforce and union relations, they oscillated between a personalized paternalistic model and an extremely repressive and authoritarian one, depending on broader power relations in the country at the time. See Hector Palomino and Marta Novick, "Reestructuración Productiva y Reforma Laboral" (manuscript, Buenos Aires, 1992); and Maria Cecilia Cangiano, "From Perón to Menem: The Metallurgical Working-Class Community of Villa Constitución, 1945-95" Ph.D. diss., SUNY at Stony Brook, 1996, chaps. 3 and 4.

28. See Marcela Jabbaz, "Modernización social o flexibilización salarial?" pp. 46-49.

29. "The new team organization of labor involves the following five basic components: 1-Team unity: Interchangeable tasks among the team members. . . . There are no fixed labor positions and the members of the team rotate among themselves according to the operative needs. . . . 2-Quality: The members of the team have to know methods and production and quality control procedures, being responsible for maintaining the quality standards of the company. . . . 3-Self-control: The team should decide its own actions and coordinate its efforts with other teams. . . . 4-Maintenance: The workers will be responsible for maintenance tasks and make a diagnosis of mistakes. . . . 5-Administration: The workers will operate computer terminals." See Carta/Acuerdo, Acíndar, June 1990. Ibid., Appendix 3.

30. Victorio Paulón, elected in 1988, promoted courses and discussion about industrial reconversion and labor flexibilization. The UOM and the supervisors' unions, ASIMRA and APSISA, participated in those courses. An important channel of discussion was the seminar organized by the TIE (labor NGO), in which

several Argentine, Uruguayan, and Brazilian steel and rubber workers participated. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

31. "Contrapropuesta de la UOM," 1990, Ibid., appendix 3.

32. For example: "Quality: the team members should be trained constantly in order to have a complete understanding of the methods and production process, as well as the quality of the product, being responsible for controlling the company's quality standards according to the stated procedures, which should be available to them in order to exercise their right to elaborate new techniques and express opinions about them." "Contrapropuesta de la UOM," 1990, Ibid., Appendix 3.

33. It is important to emphasize that the counterproposal was a joint effort by the union activists and some sociologists of labor who, educated in the French sociological school, gave workers a broader idea of other experiences, emphasizing how changes in the organizational forms of labor were carried out in other countries and could be used to reinforce workers' power in the process of production.

34. Conversations with Ricardo Saavedra, 1990. The foremen's lack of information was mainly a result of the vertical structure of power of the company.

35. In the process of union restructurization that began with the return of democracy, Piccinini supported the union sector that favored the democratization of unions, "El Encuentro Nacional de los Trabajadores," with Julián Guillán (telephone workers) and Raimundo Ongaro (print workers), who are also 1970s union militants. Although he was not directly involved with the attempt to de-Peronize and democratize the unions via elections (the so-called *Renovacion sindical* promoted by the Radical government), he did support it. See "De izquierda, yo?" and "Hay gente que tiene

miedo de revalidar títulos," interviews with Alberto Piccinini, *SOMOS*, March 2, 1984, pp. 22-23, 36-37.

36. It is important to point out that the steelworkers were influenced by the Brazilian *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) experience. They had already developed strong links with the Brazilian trade union movement, particularly with the *Central Unico dos Trabalhadores* (CUT), thanks to shared discussions about capital, transnationalization, and labor flexibilization.

37. The 29 de Mayo was formed by a group of Cordoban Radical militants who were critical of the ways in which Raul Alfonsín had solved the military problem and the human rights abuses in 1987. It was organized initially by university students and got the support of other social groups. The union militants and leaders involved were mainly from the interior provinces like Córdoba, Santiago del Estero, and Chaco and belonged principally to the bank employees' union and public employees' union (ATE).

38. Pedro Wasiejko and Norberto Campos from the rubber workers' union of the Gran Buenos Aires, Horacio Caminos from La Fraternidad (railroad) and César Flores from the train signalers, Maria Marta Pepe from ATE (public employees), Norberto Tagnochetti from Foetra (telephone), and Cristina Camusso from the CONADU (university teachers).

39. "Bases para la discusión del actual marco político" (manuscript, Junta Promotora Nacional, PPT, n.d.).

40. "Los Trabajadores requerimos una nueva herramienta politica" (manuscript, Junta Promotora Nacional, PPT, n.d.).

41. Victorio Paulón, "Sobre la herramienta política" (manuscript, Villa Constitución, n.d.).

42. Conversations with Guillermo Diaz, 1990-91.

43. Agustín Tosco, the leader of the Cordoban light and power workers, was not only one of the ideologues of a *clasista* unionism, sometimes called *sindicalismo de liberacion*; he also pushed for the creation of a broad democratic

popular front, "El Encuentro de los Argentinos," that included not only the working class but also part of the national bourgeoisie in opposition to the 1966-1973 military dictatorship. He was influenced by the Chilean popular front experience. See A. Lannot, ed., *Agustin Tosco: Presente en las luchas de la clase obrera* (Buenos Aires: Contrapunto, 1986); and James P. Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba, 1955-1976: Ideology, Work and Labor Politics in an Argentine Industrial City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

44. The hard line tended to make a schematic, classic, left-wing analysis of the crisis of capitalism, emphasizing that the industrial workers should be the vanguard of the front and closing the door to a broader social alliance. See Pedro Wasiejko et al. "Congreso por la construcción de una herramienta política de los trabajadores" (manuscript, n.d.). At the same time, this group harbored ambitions of becoming hegemonic within the front, disregarding democratic procedures, repeating to some extent the vanguard strategy. For example, some of the militants of these groups organized among themselves a so-called women's group asking for representation in the PPT, while they lacked any kind of concrete links with grass-roots women's organizations.

45. In their self-critique they compared their experience to that of the Brazilian PT. The PT was successful because it organized in the context of democratic opening when there was an important level of grass-roots mobilization. Political and social mobilization went hand in hand. The PPT had to face a different situation, characterized mainly by the weakness of grass-roots organizations and mobilizations. Since they needed more time to organize from

the bottom up, the timing of formal politics came as an external imposition. Conversations with Alberto Piccinini and Victorio Paulón, 1992.

46. This was the origin of the meetings in *Unione y Benevolenza*, which brought together different groups from the left to create a center-left democratic option. In this front, grass-roots organizations and unions were subordinated to middle-class left-wing activists and intellectuals. The meetings in Buenos Aires brought together mainly middle-class groups that had been looking for political alternatives to Menem since April 1991.

47. The CTA gathered the public employees union (ATE), the public teachers' union (CTERA), and the UOM of Villa Constitución. It has been very active in recent provincial strikes and mobilizations against state rationalizations.

48. Alberto Piccinini has been on different occasions a political candidate for these fronts. He was elected as a delegate from the Frente Grande to the constitutional convention that reformed the national constitution in 1994 and he was a congressional candidate of the FREPASO in the 1995 elections.

49. I am not saying that the FREPASO's relative success is meaningless, but simply pointing out the striking fact that the political alternatives to Menem still suffer some of the problems that the PPT was fighting against. The FREPASO was the product of a long and complicated story of factional disputes among different political groups, so it brings with it the liabilities of political practices still affected by elitism and sectarianism. Secondly, the subordinated participation of social groups in politics points out the persistence of an unresolved problem within the Argentine left: its difficulty in articulating grass-roots

organizations, allowing the people themselves to be the protagonists.

50. The company was feeling the pressure to cut costs in the midst of the reduction of the internal market, an uncertain external market, as well as the potential competition that it could face from any Brazilian products that would enter the market at lower prices thanks to the MERCOSUR trade agreement. In this context, the reduction of state subsidies enforced by the minister of economy,

Domingo Cavallo, represented a true hardship for the company. That Acíndar was pressuring the state to restore state subsidies became apparent by the efforts of Elcides López Aufranc, the president of the company, to negotiate the huge debt (around \$3,000,000) that it had with the state in back taxes. Those efforts were successful. The end of the conflict coincided with Menem's announcement of the return to the industrial promotion regulations that benefited Acíndar. Marcela Jabbaz, "Modernización social or flexibilización salarial?" Chronicle of the Lockout, Appendix 1.

51. See the women's testimonies in "Las mujeres de Villa Constitución" in *Engranajes*, CEFS, no. 1, Buenos Aires, July, 1991.

52. Ibid., p. 17.

53. This general characterization of women's involvement does not assume that gender relations had heretofore experienced no change since union activism was re-established with the return of democracy. A small group of women led by Irene García and Mary Díaz, the wives of young activists, had been organizing since 1987. They started to participate in feminist circles, thanks to the wife of Victorio Paulón, who is a feminist lawyer of the Casa de la Mujer in Rosario. They formed a small workshop to make clothing (garments for workers and children) thanks to a loan provided by the credit union. In this way they were able to acquire independent incomes and did not have to work as domestic employees. As the wives of steelworkers, they believed that they should not work as domestic employees because it is low-paid work and it was viewed as being beneath their social status. This process was accompanied by a growing awareness of some feminine rights, such as the need

to share the burden of domestic work and child-rearing with their husbands. Some of them had serious marital conflicts and had to pressure their husbands to accept this. (Interviews with the participants of the workshop, 1991).

The 1991 conflict moved this group of women militants to shift their interests in the defense of workers' rights to jobs. The number of women participating in union activities increased. If women had scarcely been involved in the union, the socialization of the tent allowed them a more "equal" relationship with their husband-*compañeros*. I once heard them say that they were no longer afraid of being with other men in the buses or the tents. (Observations of a women's meeting, 1991.)

54. Seminar on Industrial Reconversion, May 1991, in Palomino and Novick, "Reestructuración productiva y reforma laboral," p. 22.

55. The best example of this is the testimony of the steelworker cited in the epigraph at the start of this chapter. For a detailed analysis of rank-and-file 1970s popular memory, see Cangiano, "From Perón to Menem," chap. 8.

56. Union History Workshop, 1992.

57. Elcides López Aufranc, the president of the company, accused Alberto Piccinini of being a subversive Marxist-Leninist. This accusation shows the extent to which Acíndar still associates the local union leadership with the past, being unable to perceive current changes in union strategy. When Lopez Aufranc accused Piccinini of Marxist sympathies, public opinion reacted against him, declaring that those accusations had no place in a democracy.

58. "Acíndar contra el Trabajo y la Producción," March 8, 1991. Miguel sent his own representative to nearly all of the street

mobilizations.

59. Some of the comments made by Eduardo Duhalde, the vice president, pointed in this direction when he said to the press, "Nobody can tell entrepreneurs how to handle their labor force but we can tell them how they should not do it. To fire all the workers and to hire new ones is one of the ways in which they

should not do it." In Marcela Jabbaz, "Modernización social o flexibilización salarial?" Chronicle of the Lockout, Appendix 1.

60. For an interesting development of this argument see Smith, "Hyperinflation, Macroeconomic Instability, and Neoliberal Restructuring."

61. Alberto Piccinini stated that the company was trying to make workers sign essentially a new labor contract in which they accepted labor flexibilization, denying any legal force to union and collective bargaining agreements. Marcela Jabbaz, "Modernización social o flexibilización salarial?" Appendix 1.

62. After the conflict in June 1992, the union organized a collective workshop to reassess the conflict. All the participants agreed that the conflict had deepened their solidarity and union strength.

63. While Carlos Acuña and Vicente Palermo have emphasized, among other factors, the role played by political loyalties (the fact that union leaders and workers who supported Menem's stabilization plan are Peronists), Murrillo stresses the lack of economic resources as the major cause of their weak response. See Acuña, "Politics and Economics in Argentina in the Nineties"; Palermo, "Apoyos y Resistencias"; and Murrillo, "Union Response to Economic Reform."

8

The Transformations of Peronism

Torcuato Di Tella

Peronism has been undergoing radical changes virtually since its creation as an offshoot of the military regime in power in Argentina from 1943 to 1946 and in which Juan Domingo Perón emerged as the dominant figure in the country's political life. Admittedly, all political movements experience changes, especially those that begin as challenges to the establishment and with time become more moderate. Populist coalitions are particularly sensitive, the result of a shifting in the relative weight of their component parts. 1

The protean nature of Peronism is such that the first person to be surprised by the kind of movement he had created must have been Perón himself. He would have far preferred something like Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), incorporating most of the dynamic entrepreneurs and technocrats, with a popular following playing a very controlled second fiddle. Perón rejected the idea of class struggle, and all his efforts were aimed at fostering social peace in order to unify the country and embark on ambitious programs intended to industrialize Argentina and modernize the armed forces. Despite his intent, however, in actual practice his movement ended up becoming the most serious assault in Argentine history against the traditional order.²

To understand the contradiction between Perón's aims and the results of his actions, we need to consider the very peculiar, unsettled circumstances of Argentine society during World War II,

the moment when Perón's political career began. At the time there was a widespread feeling among the country's elites-especially industrialists, the military, some intellectuals, and the right wing of the Catholic Church-that dangerous times lay ahead. It was widely believed that once the war ended, the renewed competition from manufactured goods from abroad, the resulting unemployment, the

ideological impact of the disarray of the European countries, and the imminent Communist revolution in Europe might well lead to a repetition in Argentina of the years 1917-1919. At that time, the country passed through a state of intense social polarization, verging on civil war and culminating in the violent disturbances of the so-called *semana trágica* of 1919. I have called these feelings the "Great Fear of 1942-43." Sociologist Carlos Waisman has also pointed out this feeling of imminent menace, quite widespread in some sectors of Argentine society, and expressed especially by Perón, who responded with a policy of forceful state-controlled incorporation of the working class. Waisman asserts that the alarm was unjustified, a reflection of a counterrevolutionary ideology among the armed forces and other conservative groups. The existence of some anxiety is unquestionable, although more research about its extent is necessary. I differ with Waisman as to the reality of the danger itself, which I tend to believe did exist. I would argue that the potential for revolution, or at least serious damage to the established system of social domination, continued to be present for some time, although it declined during the golden years of Perón's first presidency and would return again episodically, such as during the crises of 1954-1960 and 1969-76. Those years were associated with the burning of the churches, the Peronist Resistance, the alliance with the Montoneros, and the Cámpora presidency. 3

As a compromise between our points of view, I offer what may be termed the "10 percent danger" hypothesis, applied to a system of domination at a given moment. If someone were to tell you that you had a 10 percent chance of dying the moment you stepped out of your home, you might well panic and start acting in strange

ways, trying out all sorts of bizarre strategies to forestall the danger. Most probably nothing would happen to you after all, so a future social scientist might deny that you were ever in trouble, or perhaps conclude that you had invented the danger. This hypothesis could be applied to the Argentine situation during World War II and several decades afterward, almost up to the aftermath of the Falklands-Malvinas War (1982). I would argue that during that long period, the Argentine system of social domination was objectively subject to a mortal threat, a Damocles' sword hanging over its head, tied to the ceiling with a string with a "10 percent danger" of breaking, an uncomfortable position to be in and one that explains much otherwise inexplicable behavior. This danger, however, is in the process of disappearing. As a result, among other things, Peronism is chang-

ing, maybe becoming what its creator had originally planned for it, or becoming something else entirely.

The subject of menaces, or threats, to the established order was central to Guillermo O'Donnell's early works on Latin American politics, and rightly so, even if his views as to the factors giving rise to those threats are questionable. He hypothesized that, in Latin America, under conditions of freedom and democracy, the working class tends to organize in such a way as to become an intolerable threat to the existing system of domination. That is so because, in contradistinction to the developed countries, in Argentina a dependent capitalist system cannot generate the surplus necessary to co-opt and domesticate the poorer strata of the population. This argument makes sense enough as far as it goes, but it would be more accurate if stated in relative terms-that is, in the countries of the periphery it is more difficult (but not impossible) to channel the working class into reformist and moderate ways. The historical evidence, for some years or even a decade or more, seemed to confirm O'Donnell's pessimistic forecast. More recent events point in the opposite direction and have been subject to the corresponding theorizing, which, it appears, has left aside the continuing relevance of the concept of threats to the established order; this theorizing is in need of elaboration and contextualization rather than abandonment. 4

What creates a threat to the established order is not mainly an organized working class under conditions of democracy and the scarcity of economic resources. That is one possible scenario, found especially in the early stages of development, one that often goes hand in hand with the strains of industrialization and with

rural-urban migrations. When the working class has a high degree of organization, it is likely to have obtained some benefits, thus tending to adopt a cautious policy in order to defend them. It may engage in class politics, no doubt, but that does not imply revolutionary goals-rather the opposite. In Latin America, revolutionary goals are more likely to be adopted by disaffected elites from middle- or even upper-level strata, notably the intelligentsia, the clergy, or even the military. In order to succeed in their efforts, however, it is helpful, if not absolutely essential, for these anti-status quo elites to obtain a popular following. It is easier to obtain this following by recruiting among recently migrated and socially mobilized sectors of the urban masses, the urban poor (*marginales*) or some fraction of the peasantry, than among established sectors of the organized working class. On the other hand, a political alliance need not

necessarily have an explicitly revolutionary aim in order to constitute a threat. There is a broad spectrum of attitudes and ideologies among the leaders of such coalitions, and in most cases they will be nationalist, religious, or populist rather than socialist—that is, they will not have as their goals the elimination of private property, or even very serious inroads into its privileges. But, as the saying goes, *el hombre propone y Dios dispone* (man proposes, God disposes); and God, or circumstances, often create unintended consequences for social movements. In other words, despite moderate initial intentions, threatening consequences might ensue, or even revolutionary ones, as Porfirio Díaz warned Francisco Madero when boarding the ship to exile.

There are, then, many possible combinations of variables producing a threatening situation, ranging from those that create a "10 percent danger" to those that are almost assuredly fatal. What is serious, or threatening, in these situations is not the presence of a highly organized working class, or the prevalence of socialist ideology, although that combination can be quite volatile, as shown in Allende's Chile or even Italy in recent decades—admittedly without any dramatic outcome in the latter case. More serious, and common, is the combination of a disaffected sector among the upper strata of society with a mobilized popular base which, not yet having much associationist experience, is liable to adopt millenarian ideas or follow charismatic leaders. The ensuing mobilization characteristically is weak in middle echelons of leadership, has few organizational restraints, and therefore can wildly and abruptly change direction. The Latin American experience is replete with such changes in its popular political movements. In Brazil, *Varguismo*, a rather conservative variant of

populism, became under Vargas's heir, João Goulart, a real threat to the establishment and not necessarily because of labor organization. Today a much more socialistically oriented and autonomously unionized working class, under the leadership of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), poses less of a threat because it has much more than its chains to lose and because it lacks sufficient non-working class allies, which for the time being reduces it to a minority. 5

In Peru, for decades, Aprismo was felt by the armed forces and the right to be a serious threat, not so much as a result of its ideology or trade union component but rather because of its capacity to mobilize the masses in a violent manner. Democracy, under such conditions, far from increasing the threat to the system of private property often actually reduces the threat, channeling popular mo-

bilizations along pragmatic organizational lines such as the building of trade unions and the winning of elections. A repressive dictatorship, although destroying many oppositional organizations, may often increase the number of its enemies, thus bringing upon itself the feared revolt, as witness Batista and Somoza. A time-honored strategy of threatened elites is to open up the political system by introducing partial or even total democratization, as Roque Sáenz Peña did in Argentina in 1912, quite obviously trying to avoid Porfirio Díaz's fate. Admittedly, though, in some cases the system of domination is under such intense attack that it has no alternative but repression and dictatorship. That is far from always the case.

The Nonrevolutionary Threatening Nature of Peronism

Where does Peronism fit into this panorama? I began the essay by noting Carlos Waisman's viewing of it, at least in the mind of its founder, as a bulwark against subversion. But most of those who were to be saved by it did not like the looks of their savior, or were not prepared to pay the price demanded for their salvation. So much so that Peronism, while genuinely trying to avoid class conflict and violence, nevertheless ended up as early as October 17, 1945, becoming one of the main bugbears of the Argentine upper classes. There is an all too facile explanation often given for this as a comedy of errors, seeing it as the result of the myopia of the local *estancieros* and their hangers-on, the particular blindness of the local elite who did not understand their own interests and panicked unnecessarily. This theory paints with excessively dark colors the Argentine upper classes, idealizing by contrast its counterparts in, say, Brazil, Chile, France, or Italy. A more reasonable explanation

is that the threat to the dominant classes during World War II was real enough, and their reaction against Peronism was a quite natural defense of their interests. They can be excused for believing that joining the very forces that were posed against them was not the best way to defend their interests. On top of this, the game was not zero-sum and there were more than just two players, creating ideal conditions for complex strategies and alliances.

So, whatever Perón's original intentions, his movement ended up rather soon being the main antagonist of the local establishment, even if it did include within its ranks a significant minority of the propertied classes, especially industrialists. By incorporating that minority, Peronism had much more strength than it otherwise would have had; it held out the prospect of eventual moderation. But it

was also obvious to everyone that the conservative minority in Peronism might easily lose control of the movement in a critical situation, such as the death of its leader. The right-wing minority in the movement, composed of nationalist intellectuals, was not necessarily the more moderate component of the Peronist alliance. Rather the opposite, as the minority was made up of status-incongruent, insecure, occasionally socially declining people from whom the worst could be expected because they had become *déclassé* and might be ready to jump on a bandwagon of social revolution that promised them status and power even while destroying their erstwhile peers.

The Peronist Change of Strategy

After the well-known events associated with the radicalization of Peronism in the late 1960s, the alliance and later rupture with the Montonero guerrillas, and the death of its leader, Peronism remained seriously weakened and the Peronist party lost the 1983 election. On the other side, Raúl Alfonsín had rejuvenated the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), incorporating elements from the left and, at the electoral level, getting support from most of the anti-Peronist right.⁶ When new presidential elections approached in 1989, Carlos Menem was seen as representing the most traditional and feared aspects of Peronism. The prospect of his winning the election triggered a panic among both the entrepreneurs and the intelligentsia, who for different reasons expected serious mistreatment at the hands of what appeared to be a "fundamentalist" Peronism. The well-known hyperinflation that hit Argentina between June and August of 1989 to a large extent was due to this panic. In July 1989, at Menem's accession to the

presidency, conditions existed for a collision course between the new government and the establishment, leading eventually to a seriously polarized scenario and to a repetition of the Cámpora-Isabelita period or of the Unidad Popular experience in Chile, albeit with a different ideology and another type of class alliance.

It was at this juncture that Menem and his advisers decided that a change of policy was necessary. Maybe they were already thinking of it before the elections, but the hasty transfer of power undoubtedly forced them to move in that direction. The situation also had a marked similarity to what had happened in France and Spain at the beginning of their respective socialist governments, under François Mitterrand and Felipe González. The challenge there had

not been equivalent to that in Chile, but the ghost of Allende-or of Pinochet-certainly roamed through Europe in those days and was also responsible for Berlinguer's reorientation of the Italian Communist Party's strategy. For Menem, the experience of Eastern Europe and Gorbachev's *perestroika* was also at hand. 7

The decision, then, in Argentina was to come to an agreement with the right, represented by the country's largest and most traditional business group, Bunge y Born. This group was considered to be a substitute for a nonexistent credible party of the right-a "pacto a la Argentina" if you wish, but a very necessary one to stop the otherwise fearsome syndrome of an escalation of social unrest and potential civil war. The change of policies was interpreted by people according to their repertoire of comparative cases. The majority of Peronist grass-roots activists thought it was a betrayal, but many of their trade union and party leaders acknowledged that it was a necessary compromise with the country's dominant economic interests, a result of recognizing their very high economic and military, if not electoral, power. Others, especially among the intelligentsia and the Radical Party, saw it as revealing the essentially conservative nature of Peronism. Some recalled Perón's old speeches to the entrepreneurs, his admiration for Benito Mussolini, and his moderate policies while in government; for the first time the bourgeoisie had found its party, even if it had not voted for it.

We should avoid, however, jumping to conclusions in these matters because it is one thing to make a deal and quite another to become totally identified with one's opponent. The Peronists' position in Argentina is more similar to that of the French or

Spanish socialists than to the French Gaullists (despite the Peronists' admiration for de Gaulle). The first result of the pact, maintained even after Bunge y Born lost control of the Ministry of Economy, was that the "Peronist menace" became a thing of the past. Actually, that image was already in the process of changing, in good measure because of the efforts of its *renovador* wing, led by Antonio Cafiero. The panic induced by the presidential elections was in a sense a throwback to old ways, as the public felt that Menem symbolized a return to the popular-nationalist policies of traditional Peronism. Once it was clear that he was in the opposite camp-whether out of conviction or necessity-the political scenario suddenly changed. Admittedly, at first many people believed Menem's was only a short-term tactic, soon to be abandoned and revealing his true colors. But as new signs were every day added in the same direction, it became clear that the transformation was a

fait accompli, all the more so since some of the staunchest believers in old-style Peronism were forced to distance themselves from the government, even to the extent of leaving the party or dividing the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT).

The Prospects for Party Fragmentation

The new policies adopted by Menem's government can be judged in terms of their effects on the economy and on the political system. It is not the purpose of this chapter to deal with the economic effects. However, the disappearance of the "Peronist threat" does create a completely new situation, one that has not existed since before World War II. Since that time, as argued earlier, we have been under the "10 percent" threat-a sword of Damocles hanging over our heads. Even during months of apparent calm, such as Perón's first presidency or the early years under Frondizi or Onganía, relative prosperity may have existed-but the sword continued to hang above us. Now that it is finally gone, its removal will create the conditions for new savings and investment decisions and the repatriation of capital kept abroad.

Admittedly, it is quite possible to foresee an opposite scenario, in which the misery of a wide stratum of the population, and the breakdown of regional economies and industrial sectors, will again produce conditions for the emergence of an aggressive, popular nationalist or even revolutionary socialist movement. Some isolated episodes, such as the explosion of popular anger in Santiago del Estero in December 1993, would seem to point in that direction. In that case, we would be back to square one, this time maybe with a "20 percent" sword above us. This is not impossible, although the existence of a solid trade union movement, with the

capacity to forestall at least the worst effects of the economic recession, is a very important factor countering this type of political change. In addition, disaffected elites among industrialists and regional producers, hit by the economic adjustment policies, are reluctant to start mobilizational alliances, partly because they have burned their hands with such alliances in the past. And they would have at their disposal less of an available mass following than at earlier stages in Argentine and Latin American history. Therefore, despite the existence of pockets of popular misery, involving perhaps 10 to 20 percent of the population, conditions are being created for a greater consensus politics among the organized sectors of society, while the nonorganized ones lack the means to constitute a genuine

threat (even though they may be present as a radical minority). The government's victory in the May 1995 presidential elections (receiving as it did 50 percent of the votes) is, in this sense, very significant, despite the fact that 30 percent of the vote went to the moderate left Frente para el País Solidario (FREPASO), which is replacing Radicalism as the main opposition party. Equally important was Menem's capacity to strike a deal with Alfonsín a year before in order to get his proposals for constitutional reform accepted, thus adding a second pact, this time with the center, to his earlier deal with the right. 8

Within this predominantly consensus politics, however, changes are possible and even likely in the party system. The first victim of the new economic policy, surprisingly, has been neither the ruling party nor the president's popularity, but the Unión Cívica Radical. This is because the tie that bound the many disparate components of Alfonsín's majority (which was still active in the 1989 election, lost by a moderate margin by the UCR candidate Eduardo Angeloz) was the fear of Peronism. Under this banner, Alfonsín was capable in 1983 of joining the traditional 20 to 25 percent of the electorate that was genuinely Radical to the roughly 20 percent of conservatives and the 10 percent of leftists who did not wish to waste their votes on the minuscule parties of the left.⁹ Now, after the transformation of Peronism into something quite different from its old self, Alfonsín's captive allies have become liberated. The conservatives can vote for their own parties, ranging from the free market Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD) to the traditional Demócratas or Liberales, or the provincial, right-of-center parties, including new ones such as General Antonio Bussi's Fuerza Republicana in Tucumán and similar ones in Salta and Chaco. The

left, which has seen that a Peronism in power has by and large respected the pluralist system and the autonomy of the university and other cultural institutions, can also venture out of its Radical shell and opt for the moderate-left FREPASO.

Thus, practically all the elections held after Menem's accession to the presidency have witnessed a very definite drop in the Radical vote, in some cases catastrophically. As a result, a fierce struggle is going on in the Unión Cívica Radical between Alfonsín and other leaders. Alfonsín and some of his Young Turks who retain control of the party are trying a somewhat contradictory strategy of moving to the left while engaging in realpolitik deals with Menem, while Fernando De la Rúa and others push in different directions. Alfonsín's strategy, aimed at incorporating the

disillusioned Peronists, is in danger of falling in the middle, since he is alienating conservatives who had voted for him, as well as many traditional and very moderate Radicals, while not yet appealing to the Peronists.

The right has fared well electorally, especially in its pragmatic regionalist varieties. Its authoritarian variant in Tucumán (General Bussi's *Fuerza Republicana*) and its liberal-democratic one in Santa Fe (*Partido Demócrata Progresista*), which have obtained victories at the polls, also to some extent represent regionalist feelings. The nationally more visible UCD, Alvaro Alsogaray's party, has suffered because many of its sympathizers do not like their leaders' cooperation with Peronism, despite the government's moderation and economic policies. On the whole, though, I would hypothesize that the right, in its various components, will experience a gradual growth of its voting strength, even if its continued division is an important impediment to further consolidation. 10

As for the left, split into several parties, it has coalesced into the FREPASO, incorporating some radicalized Peronists, and finally formed a coalition with another quite moderate dissident Peronist senator, José Octavio Bordón, in the FREPASO. The FREPASO has received support from frustrated Radicals and also from discontented Peronists. If in 1995 Menem has managed to retain practically the same percentage of the electorate as in 1989, it has been as a result of a significant shift of voters. At least 10 to 15 percent of the national electorate, normally right-of-center and anti-Peronist, has switched to his side. This means that an equal number of people have abandoned him, obviously in favor of the FREPASO. On the trade union front, some sectors are beginning to

form a central organization alternative to the orthodox Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT). It is often said that Peronists feel a deep animosity toward the left, which has often been an ally of the movement's enemies. This may be so for some militants with long memories, but there are not many solid reasons for applying it to the bulk of their voters and sympathizers. In Rosario, which competes with Córdoba for the status as the country's second largest city, the moderate Unidad Socialista won a majority in 1990, partly through a favorite-son effect, taking votes mostly from the Radicals, but partly by taking votes from the Peronists. More recently, in the 1995 presidential elections, the party fared well in the city and surroundings. However, the authoritarian and caudillista mentality of a good portion of the Peronist voters has also led them often to favor the military fundamentalist *carapintada*, Aldo Rico,

as a protest vote, rather than the left, particularly in the 1991 and 1993 congressional elections. This is a serious omen, although Rico's party is probably condemned to a reduced portion of the electorate and not a very long life. 11

The main question, of course, is whether the Peronist party will be able to stay together. In the first local by-elections after Menem's accession it fared quite well, despite the negative effects the new economic policy had on many of its supporters, at least in the short and even medium term. In 1991 and 1993 the Peronist vote hovered around the 40 percent mark, a decline of some 10 percent in relation to Peronism's 1989 presidential victory, but not a bad performance given Argentine precedents. In 1995 it may be said that the Peronist component of Menem's vote also hovered around 40 percent, or a bit less, the additional 10 to 15 percent coming from the newly seduced conservative voters with an anti-Peronist past. Public opinion, even among the popular classes, is quite in favor of privatization and a freer market, for whatever reasons, whether through their own experiences with state inefficiency or because of the impact of the mass media. On the other hand, the caudillista components of Peronism still exist, the trade union machines continue to be seen as defending workers' interests (together with those of their leaders), and party loyalty is strong. So centrifugal tendencies are kept within bounds, in sharp contrast with the Brazilian situation, placing Argentina more in line with Chile or Uruguay in terms of party consolidation.

The Components of Peronism

Comparative experience shows that in Western Europe, social democratic parties turning to "orthodox" economic policies have

not lost much of their electorate, although the militancy and numbers of their membership have declined. Splinter groups or new parties to their left have increased their votes but do not constitute a serious challenge, in part because of the discrediting of alternative utopian ideals and socialist economics. But is this experience applicable to Argentina? Is not Argentina's economic situation much worse than the one faced by Europe, even during periods of crisis? Finally, is Peronism equivalent to social democracy?

To begin with the economic situation, it is certainly not worse than the one Western Europe went through during the early postwar years. On the other hand, Argentina's economic adjustments have been much more improvised and full of "missteps" (an often-

used understatement these days). However, one should not exaggerate the tidiness of the European economic transitions, especially in some countries. In these matters, the differences are in degree rather than in kind. More important is the difference between the nature of a typical social democratic party and that of a populist one such as Peronism, however much it may be in a process of evolution. The two main differences are the nature of a populist party's trade union support and the presence of important though minority sectors of the upper and middle classes, as well as institutions such as the military and the church. Also important is the ideology, an ideology that to a large extent has been elaborated by the above-mentioned groups-that is, the trade union leadership and the nonworking-class elites. Let us look at these three components of Peronism-trade unionism, elite support, and ideology-to assess if there are any signs of change.

Trade Unionism

Of all the varieties of populism, it is well known that Peronism is unique because of its large and strong trade union component. The type of organization of these trade unions differs markedly from that found in their social democratic counterparts. This is the result of the way they were started, or radically reoriented, during the birth of the Peronist movement (or soon afterward) as a result of state prodding. Here there is a slight difference in my interpretation (in which I am inclined to agree to a considerable extent with Gino Germani) and that of the "revisionist" school, mainly represented by Miguel Murmis, Juan Carlos Portantiero, and Juan Carlos Torre, who stress the continuities between the established trade union movement and Peronist trade unionism, at least in the early months

of Perón's constitutional term (1946-47).¹² However, the two interpretations can at least find common ground on what transpired in the following years, since the revisionists also point to the fact that, whatever role members of the CGT's "old guard" played in the rise of Perón, they were soon dislodged by Perón from positions of influence both in the unions and in the party. The surviving members of the "old guard" and the new trade union leadership thus had to adapt to a radically different new structure, one in which orders came from above, even if they were sanctioned by popular approval. This combination of *verticalismo* with grass-roots acquiescence is precisely the main characteristic of populism in all its varieties. It not only consists of a relationship between the leader

and the masses, but also reproduces itself at the middle and lower echelons, giving rise to what may be called a caudillista leadership and to the recruitment of a special kind of person to positions of influence and intermediation. Only a certain type of social structure makes this possible, although governmental imposition, of course, can help.

After the overthrow of the first Peronist regime in 1955, the caudillista tradition survived within the movement, even though its leader had been removed from power and forced into exile. The persecution that Peronists were subjected to between 1955 and 1983, with very short interruptions, consolidated as a reaction the Peronist mentality and forms of organization. It is also true that most of the time the persecution went hand in hand with attempts at co-optation or negotiation; and thus the movement, although seriously harassed, was able to survive and consolidate itself. Among the legacies of this state of affairs, the more intense periods of persecution forced it to adopt violent tactics and paramilitary structures that had a strong tendency to linger even when they were no longer necessary for defensive purposes.

The situation is slowly changing, as the rule of law becomes established in the country and the forces capable of challenging the dominant pattern of caudillista trade unionism are freer to operate. However, this should not be interpreted as an abandonment of *Justicialismo*, and much less as a hearkening to some kind of direct democracy or rank-and-file control of the trade union bureaucracy. That would be an unrealistic objective in a complex and industrial society. What is possible, however, is a blend between a bureaucratized leadership and a participating rank and file, with

respect for minorities and a meaningful involvement of at least the more responsible and culturally or intellectually inclined members of the working class. The *renovación* tendency within Peronism had considerable influence on trade unionists in this respect, although it always had to compete with the existing labor leadership. To many, a major step backward was taken when many erstwhile *renovador* unionists joined the Menem camp and openly supported the new economic policies. This perception, however, oversimplifies reality, since it unjustifiably equates support for the new economic program with old-style bossism. The two do not necessarily go hand in hand. As a matter of fact, when, soon after Menem's assumption of the presidency, the CGT temporarily split as a result of widely differing opinions on the new economic policies, the opposition group, led by Saúl Ubaldini, was if anything more characterized by

old-style union bossism than were the supporters of the government's policies. Acceptance of privatization and free market reforms is not simply the result of a *verticalista* obedience to the president, but rather of the leadership's reading of the comparative data available at the numerous international conferences that union leaders attend, and it has caused a reassessment of the market and translated into support for Menem's policies.

In this regard, we are in store for some major changes and for a transformation of Argentine trade unionism along more associationist patterns, with the existing leaderships forced to respond to rank-and-file pressures and to coexist with ideologically antagonistic sectors in a more pluralist pattern. There have already been several cases of peaceful transitions of power to opposition slates, especially at local and regional levels, and this is likely to weaken the standing of old-style bosses. In the process, they are likely to develop a radically renovated version of *Justicialista* ideology and practices. The process of change will be stimulated by the loss of locals and entire unions to more militant forces, Peronist or otherwise. But the *Justicialista* leadership is likely to react by modernizing some of its practices. In other words, rather than dying, Peronism can grow up, although that involves adopting social democratic characteristics, whether recognized by that name or not.

Elite Support

The presence in populism of numerous if minoritarian sectors drawn from the upper classes is another characteristic differentiating it from social democracy. Not that in the latter there are no members with such social backgrounds, but they are fewer

in number and less rooted in their classes of origin. At its birth, Peronism did have a large amount of support among the armed forces and the clergy, as well as from some right-wing nationalist intellectuals, industrialists, and members of the provincial upper and upper-middle classes. Much of this support was lost as a result of the confrontations preceding the 1955 coup, although the continued economic doldrums of Argentina's recent history have contributed to refurbish it. However, the support of the country's dominant capitalist groups is a recent phenomenon and perhaps merely opportunistic. It is one thing to be prepared to strike a bargain with a certain social actor and another to merge with it in a single political movement.

Despite the minoritarian nature of Peronism's support among the propertied classes, they are neither so few nor so unrepresentative as those in the Western European model whose social democratic parties, despite their class backgrounds, tend to harbor socialist ideas to varying degrees. Moreover, Peronist support among the intelligentsia and lower middle class is also unlike the social democratic experience. It does not include most of the intellectuals or university students (despite the flirtation of these groups with Peronism in the late sixties and early seventies) nor most of the "enlightened" and educated middle class. Rather, it is loaded with rather conservatively inclined middle- and upper-middle-class groups from the interior of the country. 13 Peronism thus has a sizable component of upper-class support and it is precisely there that most of its "political" (as opposed to trade union) leadership is drawn. That leadership, in some cases, is clearly conservative, a number of them even soft on fascism, or sees itself to be the equivalent of Christian rather than social democracy. Many identify with a classic model of "national populism" that harks back to the golden years of the forties and of Perón's anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic language. Of course, there are also some minorities who see themselves as social democratic or even further to the left.

With this heterogeneous composition, it is going to be difficult for Peronism to keep together during the next few years and to resist the centrifugal tendencies let loose by economic austerity. A Social Democratic party, being relatively more homogeneous and based on a membership more accustomed to the give and take of associationism, would be more likely to remain united despite internal feuds and even serious dissension. In Peronism, the main force against divisive tendencies is the *verticalista* tradition of

obedience to authority and the movement's hierarchy as well as the members' conviction that they are part of a mass movement identical with the nation itself. But time can only erode this rather primitive belief, a belief common to the militants of populist parties generally, but one destined to decline in light of the new circumstances in the country.

The more conservative and upper-class components of Peronism, including its more caudillista sectors in the less developed provinces, are likely to become too enthusiastic with the project of "building capitalism," however savage and at whatever cost. Even if building a solid free-market economy may be a necessary step prior to further reform in Argentina, it is not likely to fulfill a popular movement's ambitions. One possible scenario is for the present

Peronist leadership, the one in power under Menem, to become the nucleus of a new conservative force, not an attractive prospect for those who have spent a lifetime seeing themselves as the representatives of the have-nots. In that case, a division would be likely, although the exercise of power by the more conservative faction would deter, for quite some time, many people from cutting themselves off from the benefits of the governing faction of Peronism. 14

Ideology

The quarry of Peronist beliefs is rich enough to take from it elements to build virtually any other ideological house. In the past it has changed quite a few times, and so it may in the future. Its intellectual eclecticism is partly due to its contradictory social composition, but it is also a legacy of its founder's capacity to integrate diverse elements into an effective whole. This characteristic, which is not simply pragmatism but something more, is a very important contribution Peronism can make to the left.

One of the main components of the variegated Peronist ideological corpus is a pragmatic reformism, not too different from the one inspiring Roosevelt's New Deal. This is combined with a Latin American caudillista variety of populism, a populism that has many roots in nineteenth-century Argentine political culture. More attention must be given to these national ideological roots in order to understand the prospects for the movement's evolution over time. The leftist intelligentsia, especially in Argentina but elsewhere in Latin America as well, has generally felt little respect or understanding for the historical roots of local ideologies and

political practices, which run from the *exaltado* liberalism of the Mexican *yorkinos* to the radical federalism of an Artigas or a Dorrego in the Río de la Plata. During the late sixties and early seventies, when large numbers of intellectuals, students, and young people felt attracted to Peronism, seeing in it a revolutionary force, there was conversely a tendency to reassess and even mythologize those ideological roots. Right-wing nationalist historian José María Rosa went so far as to consider nineteenth-century dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas a forerunner of modern "socialist" regimes. When the intelligentsia became disillusioned with Peronism, the whole ideological and even historiographic effort to reconcile it with national popular traditions was thrown away. Some of it, properly reexamined and criticized, should be picked up. This will help to place Peronism within Latin American coordinates, avoiding the

continued reference to fascism or social Christian corporatism, which are, no doubt, components of Peronism, but diminishing ones.

Prospects for the Argentine Party System

The present party system in Argentina is likely to be a victim of the current economic crisis. Probably one can say that it has served its time and is becoming less capable of representing the new configuration of social forces. In that case, we would pass through a period of political decomposition, endangering the stability of the newly established democracy. If we muddle through that period of uncertainty, we may end up with a much rejuvenated and modernized structure of political parties. Of course, it is also possible that the party system and the country's political culture will continue as they are now. But even if only for the sake of proposing a model to shoot for, let us see what an alternative party system might look like.

Most probably, Peronism, despite losing its congressional majority in the 1997 elections, will remain for quite some time the largest single party in the country, with over one-third of the total vote. A moderate form of the left is likely to become a realistic alternative, much reformed since its Marxist origins. In the 1995 presidential elections, it demonstrated its appeal (almost one-third of the electorate); and in 1997, in an electoral alliance, it soundly defeated the Peronists in the congressional by-elections. The right continues to exist, although quite divided, and with many of its voters now favoring Menem.

At some later date, in line with this hypothesis, a division of

Peronism might take place. This would be the result of Argentina's experiencing pressures similar to those that exist in other urban, industrial, and semideveloped countries in the direction of the formation of a two-party or two-coalition system in which one side would clearly represent entrepreneurial attitudes and the other those of labor and its allies. 15 A conservative coalition would then have to emerge of the various right-of-center and provincial groups, including sectors of the Radicals, with the important addition of a Peronist component which, out of sheer numbers, would perform a leading role in the coalition. This sector of Peronism would then fulfill some observers' characterization of this party as the main expression of the right in Argentina, with the important proviso that this description would apply only to one part of the movement. The main cost for Peronism in its attempt to co-opt the right and

center, which will probably be successful, would be the loss of most of its trade union support.

On the opposite side, a left-wing coalition might also have as a very important if not central component a Peronist faction appealing to "national popular" traditions. Such a group, with modern trade unionists, would find itself in need of allies and would have to look for them among the traditional left, or even among a sector of the Unión Cívica Radical. This hemisphere of the political spectrum would support the statement that Peronism is a forerunner of social democracy, but once again only applicable to one part of the movement, and in alliance with other political actors. Perón's aspiration of forming a PRI-like party thus may receive a sort of posthumous vindication; his movement, in breaking up or changing out of all recognition, would provide essential elements for both the right and the left, which together, in "antagonistic cooperation," could perform in a much better way than the previous Peronist movement the function of ensuring progress and at the same time preserving the social peace that the old colonel was so concerned about.

Notes

1. See Michael L. Conniff, *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).
2. Donald Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987: The National Revolution and Resistance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1988); Roberto Baschetti, *Documentos de la resistencia peronista, 1955-1970* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1988); Juan Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen, and Manuel Antonio Garretón, eds., *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Oscar Terán, *Nuestros años sesentas: La formación de la nueva izquierda intelectual en la Argentina, 1956-1966* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1991).

3. Torcuato S. Di Tella, *Latin American Politics. A Theoretical Framework* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 91-93; Carlos Waisman, *Reversal of Development in Argentina: Postwar Counterrevolutionary Policies and Their Structural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), chaps. 5-8.

4. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, "Tentative Conclusions for Uncertain Democracies," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), part IV.

5. See Denis de Moraes, *A esquerda e o golpe de 64* (Rio de Janeiro: Espaço e Tempo, 1989); Moacir Gadotti and Otaviano Pereira, *Pra qué PT: Origem,*

projeto e consolidação do Partido dos Trabalhadores (São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 1989); and Leoncio Martins Rodrigues, *CUT: Os militantes e a ideologia* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1990).

6. Oscar Oszlak, ed. *Proceso, crisis y transición democrática*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: Cedal, 1984); Lilian de Riz, *Retorno y derrumbe* (Mexico City: Folios, 1981); Pablo Giussani, *Los días de Alfonsín* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1986); Alejandro Horowicz, *Los cuatro peronismos* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1985).

7. For a comparative analysis of changes among leftist, or populist, parties see Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Renewal on the Left: A Comparative Perspective* (Washington: Progressive Policy Institute, 1990); and Alejandro Foxley, M. McPherson, and G. O'Donnell, eds., *Development, Democracy and the Art of Trespassing: Essays in Honor of Albert O. Hirschman* (Notre Dame University Press, 1988), pp. 91-113.

8. The so-called *Pacto de Olivos* guaranteed Alfonsín's support for a constitutional reform permitting Menem's re-election in return for the president's backing for a number of other constitutional reforms that Alfonsín had sought since his own presidency, among them shortening the presidential term from six to four years and additional limits on presidential power.

9. See my comments on Alfonsín's presidential vote in "The October 1983 Elections in Argentina," *Government and Opposition* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 188-92.

10. On the right in Latin America, see Edward L. Gibson, "Conservative Electoral Movements and Democratic Politics: Core Constituencies, Coalition-Building, and the Latin American

Electoral Right" and Atilio Borón, "Becoming Democratic: Some Skeptical Considerations on the Right in Latin America," in Douglas Chalmers, Atilio Borón, and María do Carmo Campelo de Souza, eds., *The Right and Democracy in Latin America* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

11. The Movimiento de Dignidad Nacional (MODIN), the electoral expression of the *carapintadas*, got 10 percent of the vote in the province of Buenos Aires in the 1991 congressional elections, obtaining as much as 30 percent in low-income areas of Buenos Aires. It maintained those figures in 1993, but declined sharply in 1995.

12. Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971); Juan Carlos Torre, *Perón y la vieja guardia sindical* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1990).

13. This is the point made by Manuel Mora y Araujo in "Populismo, laborismo y clases medias: Política y estructura social en la Argentina," *Criterio* 1755-1756 (1977): 9-12.

14. In Brazil also, *Varguismo* has been influential in providing electoral strength for both the left and right. During the 1964 crisis, most of its conservative elements, found primarily in the Partido Social Democrático (PSD), supported the military coup, joining the more liberal, anti-*Varguista* União Democrática Nacional (UDN). They confronted the more diehard populists, who remained faithful to Goulart in the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), decidedly oriented toward the left and in alliance with the left's traditional parties. Admittedly, Brazil's social structure is quite different from Argentina's, but some common trends are discernible.

15. It has often been stated that the tendency today is toward a

blurring of class lines as the basis of party support. In fact, parties were never wholly based on class lines. Unlikely individuals could always be found in parties, especially if their status is measured by educational levels, as is often done. Thus many

conservative voters have menial jobs, while the left includes many highly educated people with decent standards of living. The difference between a conservative and a labor or social democratic party is not determined by the class composition of the mass of their voters, but in the fact that the organized sectors of each of the opposed classes are overwhelmingly on one side of the cleavage line. For the right-left divide, see Ronald J. Johnston, "Lipset and Rokkan Revisited: Electoral Cleavages, Electoral Geography, and Electoral Strategy in Great Britain," in R. J. Johnston, F. M. Shelley, and P. J. Taylor, eds., *Developments in Electoral Geography* (London: Routledge, 1990). Regarding the impact of racial issues blurring the class character of voting in the United States, see Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991).

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

MARÍA FERNANDA ARIAS teaches political science at the Universidad Católica Argentina and has published extensively on neo-Peronismo and Peronist politics.

CRISTIÁN BUCHRUCKER is a member of the history faculty of the University of Mendoza. His publications include *Nacionalismo y peronismo: La Argentina en la crisis ideológico mundial, 1927-1955* (1987).

MARÍA CECILIA CANGIANO teaches history at Hartwick College. She is currently working on a history of the Villa Constitución steelworkers.

TORCUATO DI TELLA is professor of political sociology at the University of Buenos Aires. His most recent publication is *Latin American Politics: A Theoretical Framework* (1990).

VICENTE PALERMO is a political scientist. A former editor of *Unidos*, he has published extensively on Peronism.

MARIANO PLOTKIN teaches history at Colby College and is the author of *Mañana es San Perón: Propaganda, rituales políticos y educación en el régimen peronista, 1946-1955* (1993).

JUAN CARLOS TORRE is a sociologist, permanent researcher at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella (Buenos Aires), and current editor of *Desarrollo Económico*. His publications include *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón: Sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (1990).

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